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GUZ 51

Colossians

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - LI*

David Guzik

David Guzik's Commentary On
51 Colossians
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

Greeting

Col 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy the brother,

Col 1:2 to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Col 1:3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying continually about you,

Col 1:4 hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love toward all the saints,

Col 1:5 because of the hope being laid up for you in Heaven, which you heard before in the Word of the truth of the gospel,

Col 1:6 coming to you, as also in all the world, and it is bearing fruit even also among you, from the day in which you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Col 1:7 even as you also learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow-slave, who is a faithful minister of Christ for you,

Col 1:8 he also showing to us your love in the Spirit.

Col 1:9 For this cause also, from the day in which we heard, we do not cease praying on your behalf, and asking that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,

Col 1:10 for you to walk worthily of the Lord to all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work and growing into the full knowledge of God;

Col 1:11 being empowered with all power according to the might of His glory, to all patience and longsuffering with joy;
Col 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for a share of the inheritance of the saints in light,
Col 1:13 who delivered us out of the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,
Col 1:14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins;

The Preeminence of Christ

Col 1:15 who is the image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation.

Col 1:16 For all things were created in Him, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, the visible and the invisible; whether thrones, or lordships, or rulers, or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Col 1:17 And He is before all things, and all things consist in Him.

Col 1:18 And He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the Beginning, the First-born from the dead, that He be preeminent in all things;

Col 1:19 because all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him,

Col 1:20 and through Him making peace by the blood of His cross, to reconcile all things to Himself; through Him, whether the things on the earth, or the things in the heavens.

Col 1:21 And you then being alienated and enemies in your mind by evil works, yet now He reconciled

Col 1:22 in the body of His flesh, through death, to present you holy and without blemish and without charge before Him,

Col 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith grounded and settled and not being moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard proclaimed in all the creation under Heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Paul's Ministry to the Church

Col 1:24 who now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up in my flesh the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the church,

Col 1:25 of which I became a minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God,

Col 1:26 the mystery having been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now was revealed to His saints;

Col 1:27 to whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, who is Christ in you, the hope of glory;

Col 1:28 whom we announce, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full-grown in Christ Jesus,

Col 1:29 for which also I labor, struggling according to the working of Him who works in me in power.

Colossians 1:1-29

Colossians 1 - The Greatness of Jesus Christ

A. Greeting and giving of thanks.

1. (1-2) Paul greets the Christians in Colosse.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. **Paul:** According to the custom of writing letters in that day, the author's name is given first. Therefore the author was **Paul**; he wrote the letter while in Roman custody (Col 4:3; Col 4:10; Col 4:18), probably from Rome and around A.D. 63.

i. Paul probably wrote the letter because of the visit of Epaphras from Colosse (Col 1:7). It is likely that Paul himself had never visited the city (Col 2:1).

b. **An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God:** Paul was qualified to write this letter of instruction to the Colossians, though he had never met them personally, because he was **an apostle**.

i. "The literal meaning of *apostolos* is 'one sent'; but at its deepest level it denotes an authorized spokesman for God, one commissioned and empowered to act as his representative." (Vaughan)

ii. **And Timothy our brother:** Timothy was an honored companion of Paul, but he was not an **apostle**. "Though Timothy is here joined in the salutation, yet he has never been understood as having any part in composing this epistle. He has been considered as the amanuensis or scribe of the apostle." (Clarke)

c. **To the saints and faithful brethren:** When Paul addressed the **saints**, he did not separate some Christians from others in the Colossian church. Every true Christian is a saint. However, Paul may make a distinction with the phrase **faithful brethren**. He may refer to those who haven't embraced the false teaching that concerned Paul so much in this letter.

d. **Who are in Colosse:** The city of Colosse was probably the smallest and least important city that Paul ever wrote to. It might surprise us that Paul would turn

his attention to the Christians in **Colosse** at a time when he had so many other concerns. Yet he apparently thought the situation in Colosse was important enough for apostolic attention.

i. Paul wrote because there were problems among the Christians in Colosse, but the doctrinal problem – sometimes described as “The Colossian Heresy” – is difficult to precisely describe. It probably was a corruption of Christianity with elements of mystical and legalistic Judaism perhaps combined with early Gnosticism.

ii. The first century religious environment was much like our own. It was a time of religious mixing, with people borrowing a little from this religion and a little from that religion. The only difference was that in the first century, one joined a *group* who did the borrowing. In our modern culture one does the borrowing *one’s self*.

iii. Whatever the problem was precisely, Paul dwelt on the solution: *a better understanding of Jesus*. Knowing the *real* Jesus helps us to stay away from the counterfeit, no matter how it comes packaged.

e. **In Colosse:** The city of **Colosse** is not even mentioned in the Book of Acts. All our Biblical information about the church there comes from this letter and a few allusions in the letter to Philemon.

i. From these sources we learn that Epaphras was responsible for bringing the gospel to the Colossians (Col 1:6-7). He was a native of the city (Col 4:12), and also got the message out to neighboring towns in the Lycus Valley like Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col 4:13).

ii. Perhaps Epaphras heard the gospel himself when Paul was in Ephesus. As Paul taught in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, *all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Act 19:10)*. It would not be surprising if some people from Colosse heard the gospel at that time.

iii. Historically, **Colosse** was a prosperous city, and famous (along with other cities in its region) for its fabric dyes. Yet by Paul's time the glory it had as a city was on the decline.

iv. Adam Clarke adds an interesting comment: "That this city perished by an earthquake, a short time after the date of this epistle, we have the testimony of Eusebius." Tacitus also mentioned this earthquake, which happened around A.D. 60.

f. Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ: Paul's greeting was familiar but heartfelt. "Grace is God's unconditioned goodwill toward men and women which is decisively expressed in the saving work of Christ." (Bruce)

i. This letter – full of love and concern, written to a church Paul had neither planted nor visited – shows the power of Christian love. Paul didn't need to see or meet or directly know these Christians in order to love them and be concerned for them.

2. (3) *Paul's habit of prayer for the Colossians.*

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

a. **Praying always for you:** Though he had never met most of them, the Christians of Colosse were on Paul's prayer list. He prayed for them not only often, but **always**.

b. **We give thanks:** When Paul did pray for the Colossians, he did it full of gratitude. Perhaps those who pray the most end up having the most reasons to thank God.

3. (4-8) Why Paul was thankful.

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

a. **Since we heard:** Paul was thankful for their **faith in Christ Jesus** and their **love for all the saints**. Genuine **faith** in Jesus will always have a true **love** for God's people as a companion.

b. **Because of the hope:** Paul was thankful for the **hope** laid up for them in heaven. He was thankful when he considered the destiny of the Colossian Christians.

i. We notice the familiar triad of **faith, hope, and love**. These were not merely theological ideas to Paul; they dominated his thinking as a Christian.

c. **Which you heard before in the word of the truth:** Paul was thankful that their eternal destiny was affected by the **truth of the gospel**, brought by Epaphras (**as you also learned from Epaphras**).

i. Epaphras is described as **a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf**. This doesn't mean that Epaphras was *superior* to the other Christians in

Colosse. The word **minister** does not mean "superior"; it means "one who serves."

d. **And is bringing forth fruit:** Paul was thankful that the gospel was **bringing forth fruit** over **all the world**, even while Paul was in a Roman prison.

i. The phrase "**in all the world**" was "A legitimate hyperbole, for the gospel was spreading all over the Roman Empire." (Robertson)

ii. "The doctrine of the Gospel is represented as a *traveller*, whose object it is to visit the whole habitable earth... So rapid is this *traveller* in his course, that he had already gone nearly through the whole of the countries under the Roman dominion, and will travel on until he has proclaimed his message to every people, and kindred, and nation, and tongue." (Clarke)

B. How Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians.

1. (9-11) *Paul petitions God on behalf of the Colossians.*

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

a. **To ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will:** First, Paul prayed that they would have a **knowledge of His will**, informed by a true **spiritual understanding**. To *know God* and *what He requires of us* is our first responsibility.

i. "If you read this epistle through, you will observe that Paul frequently alludes to knowledge and

wisdom. To the point in which he judged the church to be deficient he turned his prayerful attention. He would not have them ignorant. He knew that spiritual ignorance is the constant source of error, instability, and sorrow; and therefore he desired that they might be soundly taught in the things of God.” (Spurgeon)

b. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him: Second, Paul prayed that they would live according to the same knowledge they received, living out a **walk worthy of the Lord**.

i. This is a familiar pattern, repeated over and over again in the New Testament. Our walk is based on our knowledge of God and our understanding of His will.

c. Being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. This is how we can be **fully pleasing** to God and how we can have a **worthy** walk.

i. This is an echo of Jesus’ thought in Joh 15:7-8 : *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

ii. “‘Fruitful in every good work.’ Here is room and range enough – in ‘every good work.’ Have you the ability to preach the gospel? Preach it! Does a little child need comforting? Comfort it! Can you stand up and vindicate a glorious truth before thousands? Do it! Does a poor saint need a bit of dinner from your table? Send it to her. Let works of obedience, testimony, zeal, charity, piety, and philanthropy all be found in your life. Do not select big things as your special line, but glorify the Lord also in the littles – ‘fruitful in every good work.’” (Spurgeon)

d. **Strengthened with all might:** As we **walk worthy of the Lord**, His strength is there to help us meet all of life's challenges, and to endure and overcome problems with circumstances (**patience**) and people (**longsuffering**) with joy.

2. (12-14) *Paul's specific thanks to the Father.*

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

a. **Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us:**
In the divine administration, the Father is mentioned in connection with the broad sweep of His plan of redemption. He is the Person of the Trinity who *initiates* the plan of the ages.

b. **To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints:**
It is the Father who qualifies us, not our own works. We gain this as an **inheritance**, instead of earning it as a wage.

c. **He has delivered us from the power of darkness:**
Christians have been **delivered** from Satan's domain. The word has the idea of a rescue by a sovereign power.

i. Another place where this same phrase for **power of darkness** is used is in Luk 22:53, where Jesus spoke of the darkness surrounding His arrest and passion in the same terms. "These words refer to the sinister forces marshaled against him for decisive combat in the spiritual realm." (Bruce)

ii. The **power of darkness** may be seen in its effects, and for those who have been **delivered... from the**

power of darkness these effects should be less and less evident in the life.

- The power of darkness lulls us to sleep.
- The power of darkness is skilled at concealment.
- The power of darkness afflicts and depresses man.
- The power of darkness can fascinate us.
- The power of darkness emboldens some men.

iii. "Beloved, we still are tempted by Satan, but we are not under his power; we have to fight with him, but we are not his slaves. He is not our king; he has no rights over us; we do not obey him; we will not listen to his temptations." (Spurgeon)

d. **And conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love:** According to Barclay, the word we translate **conveyed** had a special significance in the ancient world. When one empire conquered another, the custom was to take the population of the defeated empire and transfer it completely to the conqueror's land. It is in this sense that Paul says we have been **conveyed** into God's kingdom. Everything we have and everything we are now belongs to Him.

i. **The Son of His love** is a Hebraic way of saying "God's dear Son."

e. **In whom we have redemption through His blood: Redemption** has the idea of release by a legal ransom. The price for our release was paid by the blood of Jesus.

i. This is one reason why pleading the blood of Jesus – in the right sense, not in a magical or superstitious sense – has such great significance in spiritual warfare. It shows the "receipt" of our lawful purchase as redeemed people.

ii. One of the great sticky questions of theology is *to whom was the price paid?* Some say it was to *God* that the ransom price was paid, but we were prisoners of *Satan's* kingdom. Others say it was to *Satan* that the ransom price was paid, but what does God owe to Satan? This question probably simply extends the metaphor too far.

f. **The forgiveness of sins:** The word translated **forgiveness** is the ancient Greek word *aphesis*, most literally rendered "a sending away." Our sin and guilt is *sent away* because of what Jesus did on the cross for us.

i. "It thus speaks of the removal of our sins from us, so that they are no longer barriers that separate us from God." (Vaughan)

3. (15-20) *Paul's meditation on the person and work of Jesus.*

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

a. **He is:** Paul started out thanking the Father for His plan of redemption (Col 1:12). He couldn't do that without also thinking of the Son, who is the great Redeemer.

i. Most scholars think that Col 1:15-20 came from a poem or a hymn in the early Church that described what Christians believed about Jesus. This is entirely possible, but can't be proven one way or another.

b. **He is the image of the invisible God:** The word translated **image** (the ancient Greek word *eikon*) expressed two ideas.

- *Likeness*, as in the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror.
- *Manifestation*, with the sense that God is fully revealed in Jesus.

i. If Paul meant that Jesus was merely similar to the Father, he would have used the ancient Greek word *homoion*, which speaks merely of similar appearance. The stronger word used here proves that Paul knew that Jesus is God just as God the Father is God. It means that "Jesus is the very stamp of God the Father." (Robertson)

ii. "God is invisible, which does not merely mean that He cannot be seen by our bodily eye, but that He is unknowable. In the exalted Christ the unknowable God becomes known." (Peake)

iii. According to Barclay, the ancient Jewish philosopher Philo equated the *eikon* of God with the *Logos*. Paul used this important and meaningful word with great purpose.

c. **The firstborn over all creation: Firstborn** (the ancient Greek word *prototokos*) can describe either priority in time or supremacy in rank. As Paul used it here, he probably had both ideas in mind, with Jesus being before all created things and Jesus being of a supremely different order than all created things.

i. **Firstborn** is also used of Jesus in Col 1:18, Rom 8:29, Heb 1:6, and Rev 1:5.

ii. In no way does the title **firstborn** indicate that Jesus is less than God. In fact, the ancient Rabbis called Yawhew Himself "Firstborn of the World" (Rabbi Bechai, cited in Lightfoot). Ancient rabbis used **firstborn** as a Messianic title: "God said, As I made Jacob a first-born (Exo 4:22), so also will I make king Messiah a first-born (Psa 89:27)." (R. Nathan in *Shemoth Rabba*, cited in Lightfoot)

iii. "The use of this word does not show what Arius argued: that Paul regarded Christ as a creature like 'all creation'... It is rather the comparative (superlative) force of *protos* that is used." (Robertson)

iv. Bishop Lightfoot, a noted Greek scholar, on the use of both *eikon* (**image**) and *prototokos* (**firstborn**): "As the Person of Christ was the Divine response alike to the philosophical questionings of the Alexandrian Jew and to the patriotic hopes of the Palestinian, these two currents of thought meet in the term *prototokos* as applied to our Lord, who is both the true Logos and the true Messiah." (Lightfoot)

v. "*Prototokos* in its primary sense expresses temporal priority, and then, on account of the privileges of the firstborn, it gains the further sense of dominion... Whether the word retains anything of its original meaning here is doubtful." (Peake)

d. **For by Him all things were created**: There is no doubt that Jesus is the author of *all* creation. He Himself is not a created being. When we behold the wonder and the glory of the world Jesus **created**, we worship and honor Him all the more.

i. Comets have vapor trails up to 10,000 miles long. If you could capture all that vapor, and put it in a bottle, the amount of vapor actually present in the bottle would take up less than 1 cubic inch of space.

ii. Saturn's rings are 500,000 miles in circumference, but only about a foot thick.

iii. If the sun were the size of a beachball and put on top of the Empire State Building, the nearest group of stars would be as far away as Australia is to the Empire State Building.

iv. The earth travels around the sun about eight times the speed of a bullet fired from a gun.

v. There are more insects in one square mile of rural land than there are human beings on the entire earth.

vi. A single human chromosome contains twenty billion bits of information. How much information is that? If written in ordinary books, in ordinary language, it would take about four thousand volumes.

vii. According to Greek scholar A.T. Robertson, **all things were created** has the idea of "stand created" or "remain created." Robertson adds: "The permanence of the universe rests, then, on Christ far more than on gravity. It is a Christ-centric universe."

e. Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: As will be demonstrated in the rest of the letter, the Colossian Heresy seemed taken with an elaborate angelology, which effectively placed angels as mediators between God and man. Paul emphasized that whatever ranks of spirit beings there may be, Jesus created them all and they all ultimately answer to Him.

f. He is before all things... who is the beginning: Centuries after Paul, a dangerous (yet popular) teacher

named Arius claimed that Jesus was not truly God and that there was a time when He did not exist. Paul rightly understood and insisted that Jesus **is before all things** and is Himself **the beginning**.

i. "As all creation necessarily exists in *time*, and had a *commencement*, and there was an infinite duration in which it *did not exist*, whatever was *before* or *prior* to that must be *no part of creation*; and the Being who existed prior to creation, *and before all things*-all existence of every kind, must be the unoriginated and eternal God: but Paul says, *Jesus Christ was before all things*; ergo, the apostle conceived Jesus Christ to be truly, and essentially God." (Clarke)

g. **In Him all things consist:** The idea that Jesus is both the unifying principle and the personal sustainer of all creation.

i. "Hence, God, as the *Preserver*, is as necessary to the continuance of all things, as God the *Creator* was to their original production. But this

preserving or *continuing* power is here ascribed to *Christ*." (Clarke)

h. **Head of the body, the church:** This describes Jesus' relationship to the church. Here, **head** probably refers to Jesus' role as **source** of the church, even as we refer to the **head** of a river.

i. **That in all things He may have the preeminence:** This is a fitting summary of the verses found in Col 1:15-18.

i. Adam Clarke on Col 1:16-17 : "Now, allowing St. Paul to have understood the terms which he used, he must have considered Jesus Christ as being truly and properly *God*... Unless there be some secret way of understanding the 16th and 17th verses, which God

has nowhere revealed, taken in their sober and rational sense and meaning they must forever settle this very important point."

j. **Fullness**: This translates the ancient Greek word *pleroma*, and was really just another way to say that Jesus is truly God.

i. The word **fullness** was "a recognized technical term in theology, denoting the totality of the Divine powers and attributes." (Lightfoot, cited in Robertson)

ii. According to Vincent, *pleroma* was used by the Gnostic teachers in a technical sense, to express the sum-total of divine powers and attributes "Christ may have been ranked with these inferior images of the divine by the Colossian teachers. Hence the significance of the assertion that the *totality* of the divine dwells in Him." (Vincent)

iii. "The Gnostics distributed the divine powers among various aeons. Paul gathers them all up in Christ, a full and flat statement of the deity of Christ." (Robertson)

k. **For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell**: The ancient Greek word for **dwell** is here used in the sense of a *permanent dwelling*. There is an entirely different word used for the sense of a *temporary* dwelling place. Paul wanted to emphasize the idea that Jesus was not *temporarily* God, but is *permanently* God.

i. "Two mighty words; '*fullness*' a substantial, comprehensive, expressive word in itself, and '*all*,' a great little word including everything. When combined in the expression, '*all fullness*,' we have before us a superlative wealth of meaning." (Spurgeon)

ii. Once it pleased the Father to bruise Him (Isa 53:10); now it pleases the Father that in Him all the fullness of God should dwell.

iii. "Thus the phrase *in Him should all the fullness dwell* gathers into a grand climax the previous statements - *image of God, first-born of all creation, Creator, the eternally preexistent, the Head of the Church, the victor over death, first in all things*. On this summit we pause, looking like John, from Christ in His fullness of deity to the exhibition of that divine fullness in redemption consummated in heaven." (Vincent)

iv. The fullness is in Jesus Christ. Not in a church; not in a priesthood; not in a building; not in a sacrament; not in the saints; not in a method or a program, but in Jesus Christ Himself. It is in Him as a "distribution point" – so that those who wanted more of God and all that He is can find it in Jesus Christ.

l. And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself: Jesus' atoning work is full and broad. Yet we should not take Col 1:20 as an endorsement of universalism.

m. Through the blood of the cross: Again we notice where the peace was made. We don't make our own peace with God, but Jesus made peace for us through His work on the cross.

i. However, we should not regard **the blood of the cross** in a superstitious manner. It is not a magical potion, nor is it the literal blood of Jesus, literally applied that saves or cleanses us. If that were so, then His Roman executioners, splattered with His blood, would have been automatically saved, and the actual number of molecules of Jesus' literal blood would limit the number of people who could be saved. The **blood of the cross** speaks to us of the real,

physical death of Jesus Christ in our place, on our behalf, before God. *That literal death in our place, and the literal judgment He bore on our behalf, is what saves us.*

4. (21-23) *How the greatness of Jesus' work touches the lives of the Colossians.*

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

a. **Who once were alienated:** The ancient Greek word translated **alienated** (*apellotriomenous*) is literally “transferred to another owner.” This transfer of ownership, from God to Satan and self, affected us in both *mind* and *behavior*.

i. Belonging to the race of Adam, we are born **alienated** from God. Then as individuals, we each choose to accept and embrace that alienation with our **wicked works**.

ii. **Once were alienated:** This means that in Jesus we are *no longer alienated*. The difference between a believer and a non-believer isn't merely forgiveness; there is a complete change of status.

b. **Yet now He has reconciled:** God's answer to the problem of **alienation** is *reconciliation*, initiated by His work on the cross (**reconciled in the body of His flesh through death**). In the work of reconciliation, God

didn't meet us halfway. God meets us all the way and invites us to accept it.

i. One may use two different ways of understanding human need and God's salvation.

- We can see God as the judge, and we are guilty before Him. Therefore, we need forgiveness and justification.

- We can see God as our friend, and we have damaged our relationship with Him. Therefore, we need reconciliation.

ii. Both of these are true; neither one should be promoted at the expense of the other.

iii. The phrase **body of His flesh** is redundant. Paul wanted to emphasize that this happened because of something that happened to a real man on a real cross.

c. **To present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight:** This is the result of God's work of reconciliation. Taken together, these words show that in Jesus we are pure and can't even be justly accused of impurity.

i. The idea of presenting us **holy and blameless** before God may recall the terminology used when priests inspected potential sacrifices. We are presented to God as a living sacrifice.

ii. A desire to be saved means a desire to be *made* **holy, and blameless, and above reproach**; not merely a desire to escape the fires of hell on our own terms.

d. **If indeed you continue in the faith:** Those truly reconciled must truly persevere. Paul's main focus is continuing in the *truth of the gospel* (**continue in the**

faith... not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard). It is important for Christians to continue in godly conduct, but we are not saved by our godly conduct. So it is even more important for Christians to continue in the truth of the gospel because we are saved by grace through faith.

- i. "If the gospel teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it teaches at the same time that the saints are those who finally persevere - in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality." (Bruce)

C. What Paul did for the Colossians.

1. (24) *Paul suffers for their sake.*

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

a. **I now rejoice in my sufferings for you:** Paul wrote this from a Roman jail. He was able to see that his **sufferings** worked something good for others, so he could say that his **sufferings** were **for** the Colossians and other Christians.

b. **And fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ:** This word **afflictions** is never used for the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Most commentators see this as a reference to the affliction Jesus endured in ministry. *These afflictions* are not yet complete, and in this sense Jesus still "suffers" as He ministers through His people.

- i. "Paul attaches no atoning value whatever to his own sufferings for the church." (Robertson)
- ii. "The term 'afflictions of Christ' is never associated with the redemptive suffering of Jesus upon the cross. It speaks, rather, of those ministerial sufferings which

Paul bears because he represents Jesus Christ.”
(Lane)

c. For the sake of His body, which is the church:

Paul did not suffer for *himself* in the way that an ascetic might. Instead he suffered **for the sake of** the body of Christ.

i. Ascetics focus on *their* holiness, on *their* spiritual growth, and on *their* perfection. Paul followed in the footsteps of Jesus and was an others-centered person. Paul found holiness, spiritual growth, and maturity when he pursued these things for others.

2. (25-26) *Paul is a servant of the church, revealing the mystery of God that was once hidden.*

Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

a. **Of which I became a minister:** Paul was a **minister** - that is, a *servant* of the body of Christ, the church. He did not take this position on his own initiative, but **according to the stewardship from God**. God put Paul into this position, he did not put himself.

b. **The word of God, the mystery which has been hidden:** In the Biblical sense, a **mystery** is not a riddle. It is a truth that can only be known by revelation and not by intuition. *Now* it can be known, because it **now has been revealed to His saints**.

i. **Hidden from ages and generations:** This reminds us that there are aspects to God’s plan that *were not* clearly revealed in the Old Testament. The specific **mystery** Paul refers to here deals with many aspects of the work of Jesus in His people, but

especially the plan of the church, to make one body out of Jew and Gentile, taken from the “trunk” of Israel, yet not Israel.

ii. “The mystery is this: that God had designed to grant the Gentiles the same privileges with the Jews, and make them his people who were not his people. That this in what Paul means by the

mystery, see Eph 3:3, etc.” (Clarke)

3. (27) *Part of the mystery: that Jesus would actually indwell believers.*

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

a. **This mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you:** The wonder and glory of the abiding, indwelling Jesus was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament, especially that He would abide in **the Gentiles**. Therefore, this aspect of the work of Jesus in His people was a **mystery** that wasn’t revealed until the time of Jesus and the apostles.

i. “This is the crowning wonder to Paul that God had included the Gentiles in his redemptive grace.” (Robertson)

ii. This means that God is revealed to us in Jesus. Classic theologians use the Latin term *deus absconditus* to refer to the “hidden God,” the God than cannot be clearly seen or known. The Latin theological term *deus revelatus* refers to the “revealed God.” In Jesus, the *deus absconditus* has become the *deus revelatus*.

b. **Christ in you, the hope of glory:** This is the Christian’s **hope of glory**. It isn’t our own hard work or devotion to God, or the power of our own spirituality.

Instead, it is the abiding presence of Jesus: **Christ in you.**

4. (28-29) *Paul's motto for apostolic ministry.*

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

a. **Him we preach:** This was the focus of Paul's preaching. He didn't preach himself, or his opinions, or even lots and lots of entertaining stories. He preached *Jesus*.

b. **Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom:** Paul wanted the whole gospel for the whole world. He wouldn't hold back in either area – it was for **every man**, and he presented it in **all wisdom**.

i. Some translate the word **warning** as "counseling." The ancient Greek verb *nouthetountes* means, "To impart understanding," "to lay on the mind or the heart." The stress is on influencing not only the intellect, but also the will and disposition. It describes a basic means of education.

ii. The work of **warning** - or helping to impart understanding - was a passion for Paul in ministry (Act 20:31). It is also the job of church leaders (1Th 5:12) and of the church body in general (Col 3:16), providing that they are *able* to admonish others (Rom 15:14).

c. **That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:** The goal of Paul's ministry was to bring people to maturity in Christ, and not to dependence upon himself.

i. "Therefore, the aim of this epistle, and, indeed, of all apostolic work is admonishing and teaching every

man toward the realization of perfection in Christ, because that issues in the perfecting of the whole Church.” (Morgan)

ii. This work was for **every man**. In contrast, the false teachers at Colosse “believed the way of salvation to be so involved that it could be understood only by a select few who made up sort of a spiritual aristocracy.” (Vaughan)

d. **Striving according to His working which works in me mightily**: Paul’s work was empowered by God’s mighty strength. But God’s strength in Paul’s life didn’t mean that he did nothing. He worked hard **according to His working**.

i. “The word ‘struggling’ [**striving**], whose root can mean ‘to compete in the games’, carries, as of then in Paul, the idea of athletic contest: Paul does not go about his work half-heartedly, hoping vaguely that grace will fill in the gaps which he is too lazy to work at himself.” (Wright)

Col 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have concerning you, and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

Col 2:2 that their hearts may be comforted, being joined together in love, and to all riches of the full assurance of the understanding, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God, even of the Father and of Christ,

Col 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge.

Col 2:4 And I say this that no one may beguile you with persuasive words.

Col 2:5 For though I am indeed absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Alive in Christ

Col 2:6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him,

Col 2:7 having been rooted and built up in Him, and having been confirmed in the faith, even as you were taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Col 2:8 Watch that there not be one robbing you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ.

Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

Col 2:10 and having been filled, you are in Him, who is the Head of all rule and authority,

Col 2:11 in whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Col 2:12 being buried with Him in baptism, in whom also you were raised through the faith of the working of God, raising Him from among the dead.

Col 2:13 And you, being dead in the offenses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all the offenses,

Col 2:14 blotting out the handwriting in the ordinances against us, which was contrary to us, even He has taken it out of the midst, nailing it to the cross;

Col 2:15 having stripped the rulers and the authorities, He made a show of them in public, triumphing over them in it.

Let No One Disqualify You

Col 2:16 Then do not let anyone judge you in eating, or in drinking, or in respect of a feast, or the new moon, or of sabbaths,

Col 2:17 which are a shadow of coming things, but the body is of Christ.

Col 2:18 Let no one condemn you, delighting in humility and worship of the angels, pushing into things which he has not seen, being puffed up by the mind of his flesh without a cause,

Col 2:19 and not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body having been supplied through the joints and bands, and having been joined together, will grow with the growth of God.

Col 2:20 If, then, you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why are you under its decrees, as living in the world?

Col 2:21 Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch,

Col 2:22 These things are all to rot away in the using, according to the "injunctions and teachings of men." Isa. 29:13

Col 2:23 Which things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and humility, and unsparing severity of the body, not in any honor with respect to gratification of the flesh.

Colossians 2:1-23

Colossians 2 - Answering the Colossian Heresy

A. Paul's conflict.

1. (1) *The depth of Paul's conflict for the Colossians and others.*

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

a. **What a great conflict I have for you:** This **great conflict** was *inside Paul (I have for you)*. It wasn't that

Paul fought with others about the Colossian Christians. Paul described his spiritual warfare and heartfelt care for the Colossians as a **great conflict**.

i. Paul used athletic imagery in Col 1:29 (*striving*), and he continues that sports metaphor with the words **great conflict**.

b. **For as many as have not seen my face in the flesh**: Apparently, Paul had never visited Colosse himself. Most of the Colossian Christians had never seen his **face in the flesh**. Even as Paul's authority extended to those he had never met – to those who had never seen his face – so it also extends to us.

2. (2-3) *Paul's specific concerns and goals in the spiritual conflict.*

That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

a. **That their hearts may be encouraged**: Paul wanted this because he was concerned about their *enthusiasm*. He knew that discouraged, downcast Christians are easy prey for the world, the flesh, and the devil.

i. **Encouraged**: "The word he uses is *paraklein*. Sometimes that word means to *comfort*, sometimes to *exhort*, but always at the back of it there is the idea of enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence and gallantry." (Barclay) Paul wanted these Christians to be fit for heroic action.

b. **Being knit together in love**: Paul wanted this because he was concerned about their *unity*. The unity wouldn't come from coercion, but **love**.

c. Attaining to all riches of the full assurance of the understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery:

Paul wanted this because he was concerned about their *understanding*. He knew that their unity and steadfastness was not just a matter of **love**, but also of growing together in God's truth.

i. Paul knew that their unity came from not *only* love, but also from the truth, from both being **knit together in love** *and* growing in the **understanding** and **knowledge** of God's truth.

ii. The true wisdom Paul wanted them to know in Jesus would bring them together – indeed, **knit them together in love** – instead of dividing them the way that false wisdom did.

iii. For Paul, real **riches** were found in the believer's **full assurance**. Many lack **full assurance** about the character of God and are unconvinced that *He is really good and loving*. Others lack **full assurance** of their salvation and wonder if their *Christian life is for real*. Great freedom and confidence comes when we come to this **full assurance**.

d. To the knowledge of the mystery of God: The term **mystery of God** is used in a few different ways in the New Testament. Here, Paul uses the term regarding the character and person of God - something we could not know unless it was revealed by Him.

i. "The word 'Christ' is in the same case as 'mystery,' placing it in apposition with it. The mystery is Christ." (Wuest)

ii. "Others might lead them astray with specious talk of mysteries; but there was one mystery above all others – the mystery of God's loving purpose, disclosed in Christ alone – and Paul's concern was that

they should come to know this all-surpassing mystery, and know it as an indwelling presence.” (Bruce)

iii. Three mysteries are described in Col 1:24 through 2:3:

- The Church as the Body of Christ, for which Paul suffered and served (1:24-26).
- The Indwelling Christ, the hope of glory in each individual believer (1:27).
- The Revealed Jesus, the treasury of all wisdom and knowledge (2:2-3).

e. **Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge:** This is an important idea in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. With this, Paul refuted some of the bad teaching troubling the Colossian Christians. They were influenced by teachers who told them to seek the **treasures of wisdom and knowledge**, but *not* to seek them in Jesus. Paul wrote, “You will only find **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge** in Jesus. He has them **all**.” It’s not wrong to seek after **wisdom and knowledge**; but we must seek it all in Jesus.

i. When Paul said this wisdom is **hidden** in Christ, he used the ancient Greek word *apokruphos*. “His very use of that word is a blow aimed at the Gnostics... Gnostics believed that a great mass of elaborate knowledge was necessary for salvation. That knowledge they set down in their books which they called *apokruphos* because they were barred to the ordinary man.” (Barclay) Paul wanted all to know that real **wisdom** was not hidden in secret books, but deposited in Jesus Christ so that all can access it.

ii. “‘Hidden’ does not, however, mean that they are concealed but rather that they are laid up or stored

away as a treasure.” (Vaughn)

iii. “Everything we might want to ask about God and his purposes can and must now be answered – this is the force of the verse – with reference to the crucified and risen Jesus, the Messiah.” (Wright)

iv. “He is indeed the Mystery of God, profound in the wonder of His being, and yet so real that the tiniest child talks of Him with sweet familiarity.” (Morgan)

v. When Paul describes the truth of God with words like **riches** and **treasures**, he reminds us that God’s truth is precious and worthy of sacrificial seeking.

3. (4) Paul’s earnest warning.

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

a. **Lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words:** Those who told the Colossians to find wisdom and knowledge apart from the simplicity of Jesus were very **persuasive**. The lure of “hidden” and “deep” wisdom and knowledge can be both strong and deceptive.

b. **Lest anyone should deceive you:** Paul did not say that they had *already* been deceived, but he clearly saw the danger and warned them about it.

i. It might sound simple, but deceivers are deceivers. They won’t announce their false doctrine as false doctrine, and it will often be similar enough to the truth to be dangerous.

4. (5-7) Paul’s confidence in their present standing.

For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in

Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

a. **I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit:** Through prayer – the core of his *conflict* mentioned in Col 2:1 – Paul genuinely felt he was among the Colossian Christians **in spirit**, even though he was **absent in the flesh**.

i. “Paul’s sense of being spiritually present with his absent friends could be extraordinarily strong and vivid. Perhaps the most remarkable example is found in 1Co 5:3-5, where he speaks of himself as present in spirit at a church meeting in Corinth (at a time when he was resident in Ephesus).” (Bruce)

b. **Rejoicing to see your good order:** Continuing with the thought from the previous verse, Paul did not see a Colossian church that was given over to heresy. They were under serious danger, but they were still in **good order** and displayed the **steadfastness of their faith**.

i. According to Vaughn, the words **order** and **steadfastness** are both military words. “He sees the situation of the Colossians as being like that of an army under attack and affirms that their lines were unbroken, their discipline intact, and their ‘faith in Christ’ unshaken.”

c. **As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him:** This is a wonderful rule for Christian living. We cannot perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit; therefore just as you **received** Jesus, **walk in Him** in the same way. The simple things of the Christian life provide continual and reliable spiritual fuel for growth. We always have to be reminded of the **things we have been taught**.

i. "When he says that they have 'received' Christ Jesus as their Lord, he uses the verb which was specifically employed to denote the receiving of something which was delivered by tradition. In other words, the Colossians have received Christ himself as their 'tradition,' and this should prove a sufficient safeguard against following the 'tradition of men' (Col 2:8)."

 (Bruce)

ii. "That is, Paul is speaking of the doctrines regarding the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus, rather than of Him personally, for the former were involved in the Colossian heresy." (Wuest)

iii. "He does not receive his qualities and attributes [of holiness] as things apart from the Lord Jesus; but receiving Him, he obtains them. The holy man is he who has learned the art of receiving Jesus." (Meyer)

d. **So walk in Him, rooted and built up:** Paul used a curious combination of metaphors. As Christians, we **walk**, but we are also **rooted**, and we are also **built up**. The metaphors are somewhat mixed, but the message is clear: be established and keep growing.

i. "It is not usual with the apostle to employ this double metaphor, taken partly from the *growth of a tree* and the *increase of a building*. They are to be *rooted*; as the good *seed* had been already *sown*, it is to take root, and the roots are to spread far, wide, and deep. They are to be *grounded*; as the *foundation* has already been *laid*, they are to *build* thereon. In the one case, they are to bear much fruit; in the other, they are to grow up to be a habitation of God through the Spirit." (Clarke)

B. Paul warns against and exposes the Colossian heresy.

1. (8) A warning: Don't be cheated by philosophies and traditions.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

a. **Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy:** The false teaching among the Colossians was marked by an emphasis on **philosophy and empty deceit**. Most of all, it was **according to the tradition of men**. It had the stamp of *man* on it, not *God*.

i. Peake says the best sense of the phrase **cheat you** is actually, "lead you away as prey." It also had the ideas of robbing and plundering. "Their goods were the salvation they had received from Christ; and both the Gentile and Jewish teachers endeavoured to deprive them of these, by perverting their minds, and leading them off from the truths of Christianity." (Clarke)

ii. This **philosophy** that threatened the Colossian Christians was a strange eclectic mix of early Gnosticism, Greek philosophy, local mystery religions, and Jewish mysticism. The philosophy threatening the Colossian Christians was so dangerous because it was not obviously sinful and licentious. It was high-sounding and seemed highly intelligent.

iii. Vincent on the word **philosophy**: "It had originally a good meaning, *the love of wisdom*, but is used by Paul in the sense of *vain speculation*, and with special reference to its being the name by which the false teachers at Colossae designated not only their speculative system, but also their practical system, so that it covered their ascetic practices no less than mysticism."

iv. There is significant debate among commentators as to the exact nature of the Colossian heresy. Some see it as predominately an expression of early Gnosticism with some Jewish mystical elements added; others see it as primarily Jewish mysticism with a few aspects of early Gnosticism. Whatever the exact origin or composition of this heresy, it seems clear that it had both elements.

v. The connection to early Gnosticism is clear from the way Paul brings forth his points.

- Gnosticism taught that God (as a Perfect Spirit) could not come into direct contact with the material world. Paul took care to point out that Jesus is God, and He came *in the body of His flesh* (Col 1:19-22).

- Gnosticism taught that since God could not have direct contact with the material world, that God Himself did not create the world, but He worked through lesser spirits or angels. Paul took care to show that Jesus was the creator of the world (Col 1:15-16).

- Gnosticism (and some forms of Jewish mysticism) taught that God did not deal directly with man and the material world, but that He dealt with the world through a series of mediators. Paul took care to show that Jesus did the work of reconciliation Himself (Col 1:19-20).

- Gnosticism (and some forms of Jewish mysticism) greatly esteemed these supposed mediators, and considered them angelic beings of a sort. Paul was careful to warn the Colossians that angels should not be worshipped (Col 2:18).

vi. The connection to Jewish mysticism is clear from the way Paul brings forth a few more points.

- Jewish influence on Christianity emphasized dietary laws. Paul took care to say that Christians were not under Jewish dietary laws (Col 2:16).
- Jewish influence on Christianity emphasized the observance of particular days as an obligation. Paul took care to say that Christians were not under these obligations (Col 2:16).

b. **According to the tradition of men:** The Colossian heresy promoted itself as *traditional*. It could trace some or many of its ideas back to traditions among the Jews or the Greek philosophers or both. Paul here warned that **the tradition of men** has no equal authority to the word of God.

c. **According to the basic principles of the world:** The ancient Greek word translated **basic principles** is *stoicheia*. It is a word that can mean several different things based on their context, and Paul may have used such a broad word to cover a variety of meanings.

i. "The noun *stoicheia* means primarily things placed side by side in a row; it is used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and then, since learning one's ABCs is the first lesson in a literary education, it comes to mean 'rudiments,' 'first principles' (cf. Heb 5:12, as the 'rudiments' of the gospel)." (Bruce) Because of this association with fundamental elements, the word came to also refer to basic elements such as earth, water, air, and fire.

ii. Many ancient mystery religions thought of the world as a dangerous place, threatened by spirits or spiritual forces they called *elements* or *elemental forces* (such as Paul uses the word in Col 2:8; Col 2:20). They thought one was protected from these dangerous spiritual forces by either worshipping

them or by finding protection under a greater deity or spiritual power that was superior to these *elements*.

iii. Yet, one might say that Paul's meaning here certainly *includes* an answer to early Gnostic ideas, but the meaning also goes beyond those specific ideas. "It has been frequently taken in this sense as the ABC of religious knowledge... the expression must apply to something both [Jews and pagans] had in common." (Peake)

iv. Common to both Jews and pagans was the basic idea of *cause and effect* and in a sense it rules nature and the minds of men. We live under the idea that we get what we deserve; when we are good, we deserve to receive good; when we are bad, we deserve to receive bad. Paul warned the Colossians to not subject themselves to this grace-eliminating kind of thinking, and to consider themselves dead to it.

2. (9-10) *The completeness of Jesus and our connection with Him shows other philosophies and traditions are unnecessary.*

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

a. **In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead:**

This is a dramatic, airtight declaration of the full Deity of Jesus. Since **all the fullness of the Godhead** dwells in Jesus, He cannot be a halfway God or a junior god.

i. **Godhead:** "Paul is declaring that in the Son there dwells all the fullness of absolute Godhead; they were no mere rays of divine glory which gilded Him, lighting up His Person for a season and with splendor not His own; but He was, and is, absolute and perfect God; and the apostle uses *theotes* to express this essential

and personal Godhead of the Son.” (Trench, cited in Wuest)

b. **All the fullness of the Godhead bodily**: The false teaching among the Colossian Christians was something like an early form of the Gnostic heresies that would come later. These Gnostic heresies made a radical separation between the *spiritual* and the *material*. That is why Paul needed to make it clear that **all the fullness of the Godhead** was in Jesus **bodily**, not in some strange, mystical sense. John also dealt with this false teaching in 1Jn 4:2-3 and other passages.

i. A false teaching related to this in the early church was called *Docetism*, which claimed that Jesus had no actual human body; He only *seemed* to have one. Another false teaching was called *Cerinthianism*, and it said that “Jesus the man” was separate and distinct from “the Spirit of Christ.”

c. **And you are complete in Him**: This can only be true because Jesus is truly God. If He were not God, we couldn’t be **complete** in Him. Anything that says we are **not complete in Him** also takes away from the deity of Jesus.

i. If all the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, and as believers we are united to Him in a faith-relationship, then we are also **complete in Him**. Therefore there was no need to go to the false promises and attractions presented by the false teachers among the Colossians.

ii. **You are complete in Him**: Paul says that this is a fact to be enjoyed, not a status to be achieved.

d. **Head of all principality and power**: In many New Testament passages, **principality and power** describes ranks of angelic beings, either faithful or fallen angelic

beings (Rom 8:38, Eph 1:21, Eph 3:10, Eph 6:12). Therefore, Paul here declares Jesus' authority over all spirit beings. The false teaching among the Colossian Christians emphasized these lesser spirit beings, but Paul makes it clear that Jesus is far above them.

3. (11-12) The work of Jesus in His people through spiritual circumcision and illustrated by baptism.

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

a. **In Him you were also circumcised:** Most of the Colossian Christians were Gentiles who had never been physically circumcised. Paul assures them that they **were** indeed circumcised in a spiritual sense, which is even more important than physical circumcision.

i. The Colossian Christians had to deal with a whole variety of false teaching. Not only did they have wrong ideas about Jesus, but they also had wrong ideas about things like circumcision. Apparently, they were being taught that they had to be circumcised to be right with God. Paul makes it clear that they *were* circumcised, **by putting off the sins of the flesh**.

ii. "It seems probable that the false teachers set a high value on circumcision, and urged it on the Colossians, not as indispensable to salvation, in which case Paul would have definitely attacked them on this point, but as conferring higher sanctity." (Peake)

iii. Our spiritual circumcision meant the **putting off** of the old man. "The Greek word for 'putting off', a double compound, denotes both stripping off and

casting away. The imagery is that of discarding – or being divested of – a piece of filthy clothing.” (Vaughn)

iv. **You were also circumcised:** “A definite historical fact is referred to, as is shown by the aorist [verb tense]. This was their conversion, the inward circumcision of the heart, by which they entered on the blessings of the New Covenant.” (Peake)

b. **By the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism:** Paul says these Gentile Christians find their true **circumcision** in their **baptism**. Christians don’t need to be circumcised, they need to be baptized.

i. Even the Old Testament acknowledges that there are two types of circumcision: one of the body and one of the heart (Deu 10:16; Deu 30:6; Jer 4:4; Jer 9:25; Eze 44:7; Eze 44:9). Sincere baptism shows that the real “circumcision of the heart” has taken place.

c. **Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God:** Baptism *answers* circumcision, but it doesn’t *illustrate* it. Yet baptism does illustrate our identification with the death and resurrection life of Jesus. We were **buried** with Jesus, and **buried** under the water. We are also **raised with Him**, and raised up out of the water.

i. It is as if Paul wrote: “Circumcision is not important; what is important is the spiritual cutting away of the flesh that Jesus performs in the life of every believer. If you want a ceremony to mark this spiritual transformation in your life, look to your baptism and not to circumcision.”

ii. Because Paul made a connection here between circumcision and baptism, some – especially Reformed

theologians - say that just as babies were circumcised, so babies should be baptized. But this presses Paul's analogy between circumcision and baptism too far and neglects examples of baptism in the Book of Acts. Paul doesn't say that circumcision and baptism are the same thing, but that circumcision is unnecessary for salvation because we are identified in Jesus and we are baptized to show that.

iii. "The emphasis of the verse, however, is not on the analogy between circumcision and baptism; that concept, though implied, is soon dismissed, and the thought shifts to that of baptism as symbolizing the believer's participation in the burial and resurrection of Christ." (Vaughn)

iv. **Through faith in the working of God:** This demonstrates that Paul understood that the power of regeneration was not in baptism or received by the act of baptism, but received **through faith in the working of God**.

4. (13-15) *The work of Jesus in His people through His work on the cross.*

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

a. **And you, being dead:** This is the place of every person before they *are raised with Him through faith in the working of God* as Paul described in Col 2:12. Before we have new life, we are **dead**. The Bible has many

descriptions of men and women apart from Jesus Christ, and this is one of the strongest. A sick person may need a doctor, but a **dead** person needs a Savior.

i. We are not only **made alive**, but **made alive together with Him**. "It is true that He gave us life from the dead? He gave us pardon of sin; He gave us imputed righteousness. These are all precious things, but you see we are not content with them; we have received *Christ himself*. The Son of God has been poured out into us, and we have received him, and appropriated him." (Spurgeon)

b. **Being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh**: Before we have new life in Jesus, we are dead **in** our **trespasses**. A trespass is a specific kind of sin: overstepping a boundary. We are dead because we overstep God's boundaries in our sin and rebellion.

c. **He has made alive together with Him**: We can't make ourselves alive, but God can make us **alive together with** Jesus. We can never be **made alive** apart from Jesus.

i. The new birth (**made alive**) and cleansing (**forgiven you all**) go together as features of the New Covenant, as prophesied by the Old Testament (Eze 36:25-27) and the New Testament (Joh 3:5).

ii. **Having forgiven us** is the ancient Greek word *charizomai* - a verb form of the ancient Greek word *charis* (grace). We are forgiven by grace.

d. **Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us**: The **handwriting of requirements** has in mind a list of our crimes or moral debt before God, a debt that no imperfect person

can completely pay. But it can be **taken out of the way**, by payment from a perfect man, Jesus Christ.

i. The term **handwriting** is a general word for a handwritten document and has been understood in various ways. Some take it in a *legal* sense and say it represents the charges against a prisoner, or a confession of wrong made by a prisoner. Others take it in a *financial* sense and see it as a debit or ledger sheet that shows we are bankrupt before God. Either way, it means that the document that once condemned us is now taken out of the way, having been nailed to the cross.

ii. "Each of the ten commandments has, as it were, united with the rest to draw up an indictment against us. The first commandment says, 'He has broken me.' The second cries, 'He has broken me,' — the third, 'He has broken me;' and the whole ten together have laid the same charge against each one of us; that is the handwriting of the law condemning every man of woman born while he remains in a state of nature." (Spurgeon)

iii. "It might even be said that he took the document, ordinances and all, and nailed it to his cross as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers that were holding it over men and women in order to command their allegiance." (Bruce)

iv. According to Vincent, the ancient Greek word translated **wiped out** is a compound of the word *to anoint* and the prefix that means *completely*. The idea is that something was *completely wiped over*, and in the ancient world the term was used of whitewashing a wall, or overlaying a wall with gold. It means that

the accusations against us were completely wiped away and covered over.

e. **Having nailed it to the cross:** Jesus not only *paid* for the writing that was against us; He also took **it out of the way**, and then **nailed it to the cross**. He did everything possible to make certain that the **handwriting of requirements that was against us** could no longer accuse us.

i. "Paul, looking at the cross, saw there instead the *titulus* that expressed the charge against all Jesus' people, the written code that stood over against them, disqualifying them from the life of the new age. And it was God, not Pilate, that put it there." (Wright)

ii. We remember that the accusations of Jesus' crime were nailed to the cross and hung above His head (Mat 27:37). Since we are identified with Jesus in His death on the cross (Rom 6:3-8), it is as if the **handwriting of requirements that was against us** was also nailed to the cross, just like the accusation against Jesus.

f. **Having disarmed principalities and powers:** Another aspect of Jesus' work on the cross is that He **disarmed principalities and powers**. These ranks of hostile angelic beings (Rom 8:38, Eph 1:21, Eph 3:10, Eph 6:12) don't have the same weapons to use against Christians that they have against those who are not in Jesus.

i. The greatest powers of the earth at that time – Rome, the greatest governmental power and Judaism, the greatest religious power – conspired together to put the Son of God on the cross. "These powers, angry at his challenge to their sovereignty, stripped *him* naked, held *him* up to public contempt, and celebrated a triumph over *him*." (Wright) Here Paul

shows us again the paradox of the cross; that the victorious Jesus took the spiritual powers animating these earthly powers and stripped *them*, held *them* up to contempt, and publicly triumphed over *them*.

ii. We can only imagine how Satan and every dark gleeful demon attacked Jesus as He hung on the cross on our behalf, as if He were a guilty sinner. "As he was suspended there, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness, they imagined they had him at their mercy, and flung themselves on him with hostile intent. But, far from suffering their attack without resistance, he grappled with them and mastered them, stripping them of the armor in which they trusted, and held them aloft in his outstretched hands, displaying to the universe their helplessness and his own unvanquished strength." (Bruce)

iii. Paul wrote in another place that if the rulers of this age – by which he meant both the spiritual powers of darkness and their earthly representatives – had known what would happen on the cross, they would have never crucified Jesus (1Co 2:8). They were defeating themselves and they didn't even know it.

iv. Against the believer, what weapons do demonic spirits therefore now have? They are **disarmed**, except for their ability to *deceive* and to create *fear*. These are effective "weapons" that are not tangible weapons at all. Demonic spirits only have power towards us that we grant them by believing their lies. The weapons are in *our* hands, not *theirs*. We will one-day see how afraid they were of *us*.

g. **Triumphing over them:** Paul used similar phrasing in 2Co 2:14, where he had in mind the Roman victory parade where a conquering general led his defeated captives through the streets in triumph.

i. Perhaps Satan, for a moment, thought that he had won at the cross. But Hell's imagined victory was turned into a defeat that **disarmed** every spiritual enemy who fights against those living under the light and power of the cross. The **public spectacle of** defeated demonic spirits makes their defeat all the more humiliating.

ii. "Christ, in this picture, is the conquering general; the powers and authorities are the vanquished enemy displayed as the spoils of battle before the entire universe." (Vaughn)

iii. "The death of Christ was not only a pardon; it also manifested might. It not only canceled a debt; it was a glorious triumph." (Erdman)

5. (16-17) Applying the truth of Jesus' victory in light of the Colossian heresy.

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

a. **So let no one judge you:** The opening "so" is important. It connects this thought with the previous thought.

Because Jesus won such a glorious victory on the cross, we are to **let no one judge you in food or in drink** or in other matters related to legalism. A life that is centered on Jesus and what He did on the cross has no place for legalism.

i. "It would be preposterous indeed for those who had reaped the benefit of Christ's victory to put themselves voluntarily under the control of the powers which he had conquered." (Bruce)

b. Food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come: The Old Testament law had certain provisions that are done away with in Jesus, regarding such things as **food** and **sabbaths**. It isn't that those laws were *bad*, simply that they were **a shadow of things to come**. Once the **substance** - Jesus Christ - has come, we don't need to **shadow** any more.

i. The point is clear: days and foods, as observed under the Mosaic Law, are not binding upon New Covenant people. The shadow has passed, the reality has come. So for the Christian, *all* foods are pure (1Ti 4:4-5) and *all* days belong to God.

ii. Christians are therefore free to keep a kosher diet or to observe the sabbath if they please. There is nothing wrong with those things. However, they cannot think that eating kosher or sabbath observance makes them any closer to God, and they cannot **judge** another brother or sister who does not observe such laws.

iii. "The regulations of Judaism were designed for the period when the people of God consisted of one racial, cultural, and geographical unit, and are simply put out of date now that this people is becoming a world-wide family. They were the 'shadows' that the approaching new age casts before it." (Wright)

6. (18-19) *Paul rebukes the strange mysticism of the Colossian heresy.*

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together

by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is from God.*

a. **Taking delight in false humility and worship of angels:** These aspects of **false humility** and the **worship of angels** were parts of the false teaching troubling the Colossian Christians. That is why Paul touches back on these themes throughout the letter of Colossians. The antidote for both of these false teachings is simply more of Jesus, exalting Him above **angels**, and realizing that because of His finished work there is nothing to take pride in.

i. "That is to say, the heretics probably insisted that their worship of angels rather than the supreme God was an expression of humility on their part." (Vaughn)

ii. "Their humility found an expression in angel worship. It is therefore that lowliness which causes a man to think himself unworthy to come into fellowship with God, and therefore prompts to worship of the angels." (Peake)

b. **False humility** and the **worship of angels** do not make anyone more spiritual. Instead, **holding fast to the Head** (Jesus) makes us truly spiritual.

c. **Intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head:** This describes the spiritual arrogance of these false teachers and those who believed what they taught. There are few things more dangerous among Christians than spiritual pride and arrogance.

i. **Intruding into those things which he has not seen:** "That is a mistranslation. The correct translation should be 'making a parade of things which he has seen.' The Gnostic prided himself upon the special visions of secret things which were not

open to the eyes of ordinary men and women.” (Barclay)

ii. **Vainly puffed up:** “*Vainly* characterizes the emptiness of such pretension; *puffed up*, the swelling intellectual pride of those who make it. The humility is thus characterized as affected, and the teachers as charlatans.” (Vincent)

d. **From whom all the body:** When these strange, mystical movements arise in the church, they don’t appeal to the *whole body*, but only to a few “elite” Christians. This is not the cause under **the Head**, Jesus - He wants **all the body** to grow together.

e. **Grows with the increase which is from God:** This is God’s plan for church growth. We remain faithful and connected to Jesus (our **Head**), and God gives the increase.

7. (20-23) *Paul rebukes the essence of legalism.*

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

a. **Do not... do not... do not:** This is a perfect description of legalistic religion, defined more by what we *don’t do* than by what we *do*. Christianity is a moral religion; it does have clear moral boundaries. But at its foundation, Christianity is a religion of *positive action*.

b. You died with Christ from the basic principles of the world: Remembering this is the key to living above legalism. Our identification with Jesus in both His death and resurrection (as mentioned before in Col 2:12) becomes the foundation for our Christian life, instead of our law-keeping.

i. **Which perish with the using:** "They are things which come to an end in the very act of being used. Handling them, eating them, or the like involves their destruction. Food, once eaten, ceases to be food. These are not the things that matter most; these are not the ultimate realities." (Bruce)

c. According to the commandments and doctrines of men: One aspect of legalism is that the **doctrines of men** are promoted as the laws of God.

d. These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom... but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh: We might regard this as the greatest indictment against legalism in the Bible. At the bottom line, legalism's rules have no value in restraining the **indulgence of the flesh**.

i. All such legalistic rules may have an **appearance** of wisdom, but they have no real value. Legalism doesn't restrain the flesh; it *feeds* the flesh in a subtle, powerful way. "In fact, the most rigorous asceticism can coexist with insufferable spiritual pride, one of the subtlest and most intractable of the 'works of the flesh.'" (Bruce)

ii. **Self-imposed religion** is man reaching to God, trying to justify himself by keeping a list of rules. Christianity is God reaching down to man in love through Christ.

Put On the New Self

Col 3:1 If, then, you were raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is sitting at the right of God; Psa. 110:1

Col 3:2 mind the things above, not the things on the earth,

Col 3:3 For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

Col 3:4 Whenever Christ our life is revealed, then also you will be revealed with Him in glory.

Col 3:5 Then put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication; uncleanness; passion; evil lust; and covetousness, which is idolatry;

Col 3:6 on account of which things the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience,

Col 3:7 among whom you also walked at one time, when you were living in these.

Col 3:8 But now, you also, put off all these things: wrath, anger, malice, evil-speaking, shameful speech out of your mouth.

Col 3:9 Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his practices,

Col 3:10 and having put on the new, having been renewed in full knowledge according to the image of the One creating him,

Col 3:11 where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, foreigner, Scythian, slave or freeman, but Christ is all things and in all.

Col 3:12 Then put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, tender feelings of compassions, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering,

Col 3:13 bearing with one another and forgiving yourselves, if anyone has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also you should forgive .

Col 3:14 And above all these, add love, which is the bond of perfectness.

Col 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you also were called in one body, and be thankful.

Col 3:16 Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and exhorting yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Col 3:17 And everything, whatever you do in word or in work, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him.

Rules for Christian Households

Col 3:18 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as is becoming in the Lord.

Col 3:19 Husbands, love the wives and do not be bitter against them.

Col 3:20 Children, obey the parents in all things, for this is pleasing to the Lord.

Col 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, that they may not be disheartened.

Col 3:22 Slaves, obey the lords according to flesh in all respects, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.

Col 3:23 And whatever you may do, work from the soul as to the Lord and not to men,

Col 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance. For you serve the Lord Christ.

Col 3:25 But the one doing wrong will receive what he did wrong, and there is no respect of persons.

Colossians 3:1-25

Colossians 3 - Put Off, Put On

A. Put off the old man.

1. (1-4) The basis for Paul's practical instruction.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

a. **If then you were raised with Christ:** Paul here begins a section where he focuses on practical Christian living, with the clear understanding that practical Christian living is built on the foundation of theological truth. Because we know that Jesus is really raised from the dead, then our identification with Him becomes real. It is only because we **were raised with Christ** that we can **seek those things which are above**.

i. The idea of being **raised with Christ** was introduced back in Col 2:12, where Paul used baptism to illustrate this spiritual reality. Now, seeing that we are **raised with Christ**, certain behavior is appropriate to us.

ii. "The opening verses of chapter 3 sustain the closest connection with the closing verses of chapter 2. There the apostle reminds the Colossians that ascetic regulations are of no real value in restraining indulgence of the flesh. The only remedy for sinful passions is found in the believers' experience of union with Christ." (Vaughan)

iii. Because we **were raised with Christ**, we should act just as Jesus did when He was resurrected.

- After His resurrection, Jesus left the tomb. So should we – we don't live there any more.

- After His resurrection, Jesus spent His remaining time being with and ministering to His disciples. So should we – live our lives to be with and to serve one another.
- After His resurrection, Jesus lived in supernatural power with the ability to do impossible things. So should we – with the power and the enabling of the Holy Spirit.
- After His resurrection, Jesus looked forward to heaven, knowing He would soon enough ascend there. So should we – recognizing that our citizenship is in heaven.

iv. To emphasize it even more, Paul added the phrase, **sitting at the right hand of God**: “This phrase, particularly in its allusion to Psalms 110, focuses attention on the sovereign rule which Christ now exercises. The command to aspire to the things of heaven is a command to meditate and dwell upon Christ’s sort of life, and on the fact that he is now enthroned as the Lord of the world.” (Wright)

b. **Set your mind on things above**: The best Christian living comes from minds that are fixed on *heaven*. They realize that their lives are now **hidden with Christ in God**, and since Jesus is enthroned in heaven, their thoughts and hearts are connected to heaven also.

i. “The believer is to ‘seek the things... above.’ The word ‘seek’ marks aspiration, desire, and passion... In order to seek these things the mind must be set on them.” (Morgan)

ii. “Love *heavenly things*; *study* them; let your hearts be entirely *engrossed* by them. Now, that you are converted to God, act in reference to heavenly things

as ye did formerly in reference to those of earth.” (Clarke)

iii. “‘Earthly things’ are not all evil, but some of them are. Even things harmless in themselves become harmful if permitted to take the place that should be reserved for the things above.” (Vaughan)

c. **When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory:** The promise of the return of Jesus is not only that we will see *His* glory, but so that we also **will appear with Him in glory**. This is the *revealing of the sons of God* mentioned in Rom 8:19

i. **Christ who is our life:** In another place, Paul wrote *For me to live is Christ* (Php 1:21). Here he shows that this idea was not just for special apostles, but for all believers – **Christ who is our life**. Sometimes we say, “Music is his life” or “Sports is his life” or “He lives for his work.” Of the Christian it should be said, “Jesus Christ is his life.”

ii. On that day, all will see the saints of God for what they *really are*, not as they merely appear to this world. “Paul, the prisoner, an eccentric Jew to the Romans and a worse-than-Gentile traitor to the Jews, will be seen as Paul the apostle, the servant of the King. The Colossians, insignificant ex-pagans from a third-rate country town, will be seen in a glory which, if it were now to appear, one might be tempted to worship.” (Wright)

2. (5-7) **Put to death** the things that are against God and part of this world.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because

of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

a. **Therefore put to death your members:** **Therefore** points back to our identification with the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus mentioned in Col 3:1-4. It is because we understand this fact that we can **put to death** the things in our life that are contrary to our identity with Jesus.

i. "The verb *nekrosate*, meaning literally 'to make dead,' is very strong. It suggests that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes. We are to wipe them out, completely exterminate the old way of life." (Vaughan)

ii. We **put to death** in the sense of denying these things and considering them dead to us and us dead to them. "To *gratify* any sensual appetite is to give it the very food and nourishment by which it lives, thrives, and is active." (Clarke)

iii. There is importance in *listing* and *naming* these sins as Paul does in this section. "It is far easier to drift into a sin which one does not know by name than consciously to choose one whose very title should be repugnant to a Christian." (Wright)

b. **Fornication, uncleanness, passion and evil desire:** Each of these terms refers to sexual sins. **Covetousness** is simple, but insidious greed, and nothing less than **idolatry**. There is no way that Jesus would walk in any of these sins, so if we identify with Him, we won't walk in them either.

i. **Fornication:** "The word here translated *sexual immorality* refers to any intercourse outside marriage; in the ancient world, as in the modern,

intercourse with a prostitute would be a specific, and in a pagan culture a frequent, instance of this.” (Wright)

ii. **Uncleanness:** “A wider range of meaning than fornication. It includes the misuse of sex, but is applicable to various forms of moral evil.” (Bruce)

iii. Morgan lists three ways that covetousness is terribly destructive:

- “First, it is idolatry, in that it only obtains when man thinks of life consisting in things possessed, rather than in righteous relationship to God.”
- “It is also a sin against others, for to satisfy the desire, others are wronged.”
- “Finally, it is self-destructive, for these wrong conceptions and activities always react upon the soul to its own undoing.”
- Morgan added: “And yet, what ecclesiastical court ever yet arraigned a church-member for covetousness?”

iv. “Every godly man seeks his happiness in God; the covetous man seeks that in his money which God alone can give; therefore his covetousness is properly *idolatry*.” (Clarke)

c. **Because of these things:** The sins mentioned previously are part of the way the world lives and not the way Jesus lives. Every Christian is faced with a question: “Who will I identify with, the world or with Jesus?”

d. **The wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience:** These sins invite **the wrath of God**. Because the world loves this kind of sinful lifestyle, they don’t come in humility to Jesus. As they continue in these sins, it adds to their condemnation. One sin is

enough to send anyone to hell (Jas 2:10), but there are greater levels of condemnation (Mat 23:14).

- i. In part, **the wrath of God** comes as God allows men to continue in sinful - and therefore self-destructive - behavior (as in Rom 1:24-32).

e. **In which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them:** These sins may mark a world in rebellion against God, but they are in the *past tense* for the Christian.

- i. Simply put, the Christian should not live like the **sons of disobedience**. A true Christian can not be comfortable in habitual sin.
- ii. Paul says that Christians **once walked** in these sins. It is possible - though tragic - that these sins should *occasionally* mark a Christian's life, but they must not be a Christian's **walk**, their manner of living.

3. (8-9) *Removing other traces of worldliness.*

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

a. **But now you yourselves are to put off all these:** The sins Paul next lists (**anger, wrath**, and so forth) are regarded by many as "little" sins that Christians may overlook with little danger. Paul challenges us to **put off** the old man in every area of our lives.

- i. "Put off all those old habits, just as you would discard an outworn suit of clothes which no longer fitted you." (Bruce)

b. **Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie:** Each of these sins are

primarily committed by what we say. When Paul calls the believer to a deeper obedience, he tells us to *bridle* our *tongue* (as did James in Jas 1:26; Jas 3:1-9).

i. Nevertheless, it is also possible to **lie to one another** without words. "It is easy to distort the truth; an alteration in the tone of voice or an eloquent look will do it; and there are silences which can be as false and misleading as any words." (Barclay)

c. **Since you have put off the old man with his deeds:** The more notorious sins of Col 3:5 are easily seen as incompatible with the nature of Jesus. But these "lesser" sins are also incompatible, so **put off** these sins also.

i. In this section (Col 3:5-9) Paul showed two high priorities in Christian living: sexual morality connected with a right attitude towards material things,

and simple getting along in love with one another. It is easy for a Christian community to compromise one for the other, but Paul (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) insisted that they *both* have a high place in Christian practice.

ii. **You have put off the old man with his deeds** means that in Jesus Christ, the saints of God are *different people*. Therefore, "When a tide of passion or a surge of anger is felt, it must be dealt with as the alien intruder it really is, and turned out of the house as having no right to be there at all, let alone to be giving orders." (Wright)

B. Put on the new man.

1. (10-11) *As we put off the old man, we must put on the new man.*

And have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

a. **Put on the new man:** The phrase Paul used was commonly used for changing a set of clothes. We can almost picture a person taking off the old and putting on the **new man** in Jesus.

b. **Who is renewed in knowledge:** Because the new man is **renewed in knowledge**, he is hungry to know what *God says* in His Word.

c. **According to the image of Him who created him:** Paul is clearly alluding to Gen 1:27, where it is said that God created Adam in His own image. Nevertheless, now that the first Adam is regarded as the **old man** who should be put off and discarded, because now we are created after the **image** of the *second* Adam, Jesus Christ.

d. **Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free:** The new man is part of a family, which favors no race, nationality, class, culture or ethnicity. It only favors Jesus, because in this new family, **Christ is all and in all.**

i. This work of the new creation not only deals with the old man and gives us the new man patterned after Jesus Christ; it also breaks down the barriers that separate people in society. Among new creation people it doesn't matter if one is **Greek** or **Jew** or **circumcised** or **uncircumcised** or a **Scythian** or a **slave** or a **free** man. All those barriers are broken down.

ii. "He therefore adds to barbarian the Scythian as the extreme example." (Peake)

iii. All of these barriers existed in the ancient Roman world; and the power of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ broke them all down. Especially powerful was the barrier between **slave** and **free**, but Christianity changed that.

iv. "In times of persecution slaves showed that they could face the trial and suffer for their faith as courageously as freeborn Romans. The slave-girl Blandina and her mistress both suffered in the persecution which broke out against the churches of the Rhone valley in A.D. 177, but it was the slave-girl who was the hero of the persecution, impressing friend and foe alike as a 'noble athlete' in the contest of martyrdom." (Bruce)

v. "In the arena of Carthage in A.D. 202 a profound impression was made on the spectators when the Roman matron Perpetua stood hand-in-hand with her slave Felicitas, as both women faced a common death for a common faith." (Bruce)

2. (12-17) Life of the new man.

Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to

the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

a. **Therefore, as the elect of God:** The new man is **elect of God**. This means that God has *chosen* the Christian, and chosen him to be something special in His plan. “**Elect**” is a word that frightens some, but it should be taken both as a comfort and as a destiny to fulfill.

b. **Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility:** Each one of the qualities mentioned in this passage express themselves in *relationships*. A significant measure of our Christian life is found simply in how we treat people and the quality of our relationships with them.

i. “It is most significant to note that every one of the graces listed has to do with personal relationships between man and man. There is no mention of virtues like efficiency or cleverness, not even of diligence or industry – not that these things are unimportant. But the great basic Christian virtues are those which govern human relationships.” (Barclay)

ii. **Tender mercies:** If something is **tender**, it is sensitive to touch. “The apostle would have them to *feel* the *slightest touch* of another’s misery; and, as their clothes are put over their body, so their tenderest feeling should be always within reach of the miserable.” (Clarke)

iii. **Kindness:** “The ancient writers defined *chrestotes* as the virtue of the man whose neighbour’s good is as dear to him as his own... It is used of wine which has grown mellow with age and lost its harshness. It is the word used when Jesus said, ‘My yoke is *easy*.’ (Mat 11:30).” (Barclay)

iv. We can say that **humility** (which was *not* considered a virtue among the ancient Greeks) is the “parent” of both **meekness** and **longsuffering**. **Meekness** shows how **humility** will effect my *actions* towards others; I will not dominate, manipulate, or coerce for my own ends, even if I have the power and the ability. **Longsuffering** shows how **humility** will effect my *reaction* towards others; I will not become impatient, short, or filled with resentment towards the weaknesses and sins of others.

c. **Forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do:** We are told to live **forgiving one another**, after the pattern of Jesus’ forgiveness towards us. Understanding the way Jesus forgave us will always make us *more* generous with forgiveness, and never less generous.

i. When we consider the staggering debt Jesus forgave for us, and the comparative smallness of the debts others have toward us, it is base ingratitude for us to not forgive them (as in the parable Jesus spoke in Mat 18:21-35). “The forgiveness they have received is used to enforce the duty of forgiving others.” (Peake)

ii. When one thinks of how **Christ forgave you** it should make us much more generous with forgiveness.

- God holds back His anger a very long time when we sin against Him. He bears with us a long time, even when we sorely provoke Him.
- God reaches out to *bad people* to bring forgiveness to them; the habit of man is to not reconcile if the offending person is a person of bad character.

- God makes the first move towards us in forgiveness; the habit of man is to only be reconciled if the offending party craves forgiveness and makes the first move.
- God forgives often knowing that we will sin again, sometimes in the exact same way. It is the habit of man to forgive only if the offending party solemnly promises to never do the wrong again.
- God's forgiveness is so complete and glorious that He grants adoption to those former offenders. In the habit of man, even when forgiveness is offered, he will not lift again the former offender to a place of high status and partnership.
- God bore *all* the penalty for the wrong we did against Him. In the habit of man, when he is wronged, he will not forgive unless the offender agrees to bear all the penalty for the wrong done.
- God keeps reaching out to man for reconciliation even when man refuses Him again and again. In the habit of man, one will not continue to offer reconciliation if it is rejected once.
- God requires no probationary period to receive His forgiveness; in the habit of man, one will not restore an offender without a period of probation.
- God's forgiveness offers complete restoration and honor; in the habit of man, we feel we should be complimented when we merely *tolerate* those who sin against us.
- Once having forgiven, God puts His trust in us and invites us back to work with Him as co-laborers. In the habit of man, one will not trust someone who has formerly wronged him.

iii. "Suppose that someone had grievously offended any one of you, and that he asked your forgiveness, do you not think that you would probably say to him, 'Well, yes, I forgive you; but I - I - I - cannot forget it'? Ah! dear friends, that is a sort of forgiveness with one leg chopped off, it is a lame forgiveness, and is not worth much." (Spurgeon)

d. **Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection:** **Love** is the summary of all the things described in this passage. Love perfectly fulfills what God requires of us in relationships.

i. **But above all these things put on love:** "*Upon all, over all; as the outer garment envelopes all the clothing, so let charity or love invest and encompass all the rest... Let this, therefore, be as the upper garment... that invests the whole man.*" (Clarke)

ii. "All the virtues listed in vv. 12, 13 are, on the highest level, manifestations of love; but love is larger than any one of them, indeed, larger than all of them combined." (Vaughan)

iii. "The other virtues, pursued without love, become distorted and unbalanced." (Wright)

e. **And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body:** The rule of **the peace of God** means that **peace** should *characterize* the community of God's people, and that **peace** is a standard for discerning God's will.

i. "The apostle says, Let it rule. The Greek word means arbitrate. Whenever there is a doubtful issue to be decided, and by one course your peace may be disturbed, whilst by another it may be maintained, choose the things that make for peace, whether for

yourselves or others. Let God's peace act as umpire."
(Meyer)

ii. "Let the peace of Christ *judge, decide, and govern* in your hearts, as the *brabeus*, or judge, does in the Olympic contests... When a man loses his *peace*, it is an awful proof that he has lost something else that he has given way to evil, and grieved the Spirit of God."
(Clarke)

iii. Wright sees the context of community: "'Peace' here is not the inward, individual peace of mind which accompanies humble confident trust in God's love, but a peace which characterizes the community, the 'body' as a whole."

f. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs: The new man walks in the word of God and in worship with other believers.

i. **Dwell in you:** "There appears to be here an allusion to the *Shechinah*, or symbol of the Divine presence, which *dwelt* in the *tabernacle* and first *temple*." (Clarke)

ii. **Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs:** This variety suggests that God delights in creative, spontaneous worship. The emphasis is more on *variety* than on *strict categories*. "We can scarcely say what is the exact difference between these three expressions." (Clarke)

iii. "The word of Christ is to dwell in them so richly that it finds spontaneous expression in religious song in the Christian assemblies or the home." (Peake)

g. Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus: The new man lives his life, **all** his life, for Jesus. He will only seek

to do the things that he *may* do **in the name of the Lord Jesus**, and he will persevere in the difficulty of doing such things, knowing that he is doing them **in the name of the Lord Jesus**.

3. (18-19) *The new man's marriage relationship.*

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

a. **Wives, submit:** The ancient Greek word translated **submit** is essentially a word borrowed from the military. It literally means "to be under in rank." It speaks of the way that an army is organized among levels of rank, with generals and colonels and majors and captains and sergeants and privates. There are levels of rank, and one is obligated to respect those in higher rank.

i. We know that as a person, a private can be smarter, more talented, and be a better person than a general. But he is still *under rank* to the general. He isn't submitted to the general so much as a *person* as he is to the general as a *general*. In the same way, the wife doesn't submit to her husband because he *deserves* it. She submits because he is her husband.

ii. The idea of submission doesn't have anything to do with someone being smarter or better or more talented. It has to do with a God-appointed order. "Anyone who has served in the armed forces knows that 'rank' has to do with order and authority, not with value or ability." (Wiersbe)

iii. "The equality of men and women before the Lord, of which Paul wrote in Gal 3:28, has not been retracted: but neither does it mean identity of role or function." (Wright)

iv. Therefore, submission means you are part of a team. If the family is a team, then the husband is "captain" of the team. The wife has her place in relation to the "captain," and the children have their place in relation to the "captain" and the wife.

v. "The form of the verb (*hypotassesthe*, middle voice) shows that the submission is to be voluntary. The wife's submission is never to be forced on her by a demanding husband; it is the deference that a loving wife, conscious that her home (just as any other institution) must have a head, gladly shows." (Vaughan)

b. **Wives, submit to your own husbands:** This defines the *sphere* of a wife's submission - to her **own husband**. The Bible never commands nor recommends a *general* submission of women unto men. It is commanded only in the spheres of the home and in the church. God does not command that men have exclusive authority in the areas of politics, business, education, and so on.

c. **As is fitting in the Lord:** This is a crucial phrase. It colors everything else we understand about this passage. There have been two main "wrong" interpretations of this phrase, each favoring a certain "position."

i. The interpretation that "favors" the husband says that **as is fitting in the Lord** means that a wife should submit to her husband as if he were God himself. The idea is "you submit to God in absolutely everything without question, so you must submit to your husband in the same absolute way." This thinks that **as is fitting in the Lord** defines the *extent* of submission. But this is wrong. Simply put, *in no place* does the Scripture say that a person should submit to another in that way. There are limits to the submission your employer can expect of you. There

are limits to the submission the government can expect of you. There are limits to the submission parents can expect of children. In no place does the Scripture teach an unqualified, without exception, submission – except to God and God alone. To violate this is to commit the sin of idolatry.

ii. The interpretation that “favors” the wife says that **as is fitting in the Lord** means “I’ll submit to him as long as he does what the Lord wants.” And then it is the wife’s job to decide what the Lord wants. This thinks that **as is fitting in the Lord** defines the *limit* of submission. This is also wrong. It is true that there are limits to a wife’s submission, but when the wife approaches **as is fitting in the Lord** in this way, then it degenerates into a case of “I’ll submit to my husband when I agree with him. I’ll submit to him when he makes the right decisions and carries them out the right way. When he makes a wrong decision, he isn’t **in the Lord**, so I shouldn’t submit to him then. It isn’t **fitting** to do so.” Simply put, *that is not submission at all*. Except for those who are just plain cantankerous and argumentative, *everyone* submits to others when they are in agreement. It is only when there is a *disagreement* that submission is tested.

iii. **As is fitting in the Lord** does not define the *extent* of a wife’s submission. It does not define the *limit* of a wife’s submission. It defines the *motive* of a wife’s submission. It means, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands because it is a part of your duty to the Lord, because it is an expression of your submission to the Lord.” They submit simply because it **is fitting in the Lord** to do it. It honors God’s Word and His order of authority. It is part of their Christian duty and discipleship.

iv. "The phrase 'in the Lord' indicates that wifely submission is proper not only in the natural order but also in the Christian order. The whole thing, then, is lifted to a new and higher level." (Vaughan)

v. Therefore, **as is fitting in the Lord** means:

- For wives, submission to their husband is part of their Christian life.

- When a wife doesn't obey this word to **submit to your own husband as is fitting in the Lord**, she doesn't just fall short as a wife. She falls short as a follower of Jesus Christ.

- This means that the command to submit is completely out of the realm of "my nature" or "my personality." Wives aren't expected to submit because they are the "submissive type." They are expected to submit because it is **fitting in the Lord**.

- This has nothing to do with your husband's intelligence or giftedness or capability. It has to do with honoring the Lord Jesus Christ.

- This has nothing to do with whether or not your husband is "right" on a particular issue. It has to do with Jesus being right.

- This means that a woman should take great care in how she *chooses* her husband. Remember, ladies: this is what God requires of you in marriage. This is *His* expectation of you. Instead of looking for an attractive man, instead of looking for a wealthy man, instead of looking for a romantic man, you better first look for a man you can *respect*.

vi. As is the case in every human relationship, the command to submit is not absolute. There are exceptions to this command for a wife to **submit to her own husband**.

- When the husband asks the wife to sin, she must not submit.
- When the husband is medically incapacitated, insane, or under the influence of mind altering substances, the wife may not submit.
- When the husband is violent and physically threatening, the wife may not submit.
- When the husband breaks the marriage bond by adultery, the wife does not need to submit to her husband being in an adulterous relationship.

vii. "If a Stoic disciple asked why he should behave in a particular way, his teacher would no doubt tell him that it was 'fitting' because it was in conformity with nature. When a Christian convert asked the same question, he was told that such behavior was 'fitting in the Lord'; members of the believing community should live thus for Christ's sake." (Bruce)

d. **Husbands, love your wives:** Paul's words to husbands safeguards his words to wives. Though wives are to submit to their husbands, it never excuses husbands acting as tyrants over their wives. Instead, a husband must **love** his wife, and the ancient Greek word translated **love** here is *agape*.

i. Significantly, this puts an obligation upon the **husbands**. In the ancient world – under Jewish, Greek, and Roman customs, *all* power and privileges belonged to husbands in regard to wives, to fathers in regard to children, and to masters in regard to slaves. There were no complimentary powers or privileges on the part of wives, children, or slaves.

ii. "*Agapao* does not denote affection or romantic attachment; it rather denotes caring love, a

deliberate attitude of mind that concerns itself with the well-being of the one loved.” (Vaughan)

iii. Strictly speaking, *agape* can’t be defined as “God’s love,” because men are said to *agape* sin and the world (Joh 3:19, 1Jn 2:15). But it can be defined as a sacrificial, giving, absorbing, love. The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another.

- It is a love that loves without changing.
- It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment.
- It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing.
- It is love that loves even when it is rejected.
- *Agape* love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given. It gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.

iv. We can read this passage and think that Paul means, “Husband, be kind to your wife.” Or “Husband, be nice to your wife.” There is no doubt that for many marriages, this would be a huge improvement. But that isn’t what Paul writes about. What he really means is, “Husband, continually practice self-denial for the sake of your wife.”

v. Of course, this *agape* love is the kind of love Jesus has for His people and this is the love husbands should imitate towards their wives (Eph 5:25).

e. **And do not be bitter toward them:** The implication is perhaps the wife has given the husband some *reason to be bitter*. Paul says, “That doesn’t matter, husband.” The husband may feel perfectly justified in his

harsh or unloving attitude and actions towards his wife, but he is not justified - *no matter how the wife has been towards the husband.*

- i. *Agape* loves even when there are obvious and glaring deficiencies, even when the receiver is unworthy of the love.

4. (20-21) *The new man's parent and child relationship.*

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

a. **Children, obey your parents in all things:** Paul has in mind children who are still in their parents' household and under their authority. For these, they must not only *honor* their father and mother (as in Eph 6:2), but they must also **obey** them, and **obey** them **in all things**.

- i. When a child is grown and out of his parents' household, he is no longer under the same obligation of *obedience*, but the obligation to *honor your father and mother* remains.

b. **For this is well pleasing to the Lord:** This is one of the important *reasons* for a child's obedience. When a child respects his parent's authority, he is respecting God's order of authority in other areas of life.

- i. This idea of an order of authority and submission to an order of authority are so important to God that they are part of His very being. The First Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Father*; the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Son*. Inherent in those titles is a relationship of authority and submission to authority.

- ii. The Father exercises authority over the Son, and the Son submits to the Father's authority - and this is in the very nature and being of God! Our failure to

exercise Biblical authority, and our failure to submit to Biblical authority, isn't just wrong and sad - it sins against the very nature of God. Remember 1Sa 15:23 : *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.*

c. **Fathers, do not provoke your children:** Children have a responsibility to obey, but parents - here, put into one as **fathers** - have a responsibility to **not provoke** their **children**. Parents can **provoke** their children by being too harsh, too demanding, too controlling, unforgiving, or just plain angry. This harshness can be expressed through words, through actions, or through non-verbal communication.

i. In most parenting problems, the parent blames the child. It is easy to do because the problem is usually most evident in the bad behavior in the child. But Paul wisely reminds us that the bad behavior may actually be *provoked* by the parent. When this is the case, it doesn't justify the bad behavior of the child, but it may explain part of its cause. It is commanded of parents to do everything they can to **not provoke** their **children**.

ii. **Provoke:** "Irritate by exacting commands and perpetual faultfinding and interference for interference' sake." (Peake)

iii. "Parents, and specially fathers, are urged not to irritate their children by being so unreasonable in their demands that their children lose heart and come to think that it is useless trying to please their parents." (Bruce)

iv. "The word 'fathers' can refer to parents of both sexes, though it may well have an eye to the importance of the father's role, within God's created order, in the upbringing of children." (Wright)

d. **Lest they become discouraged:** Children who grow up with parents who provoke them will **become discouraged**. They will not feel the love and the support from their parents like they should, and they will come to believe that the whole world is against them because they feel their parents are against them. This reminds us how important it is to season our parenting with lots of grace. Perhaps we should be as gracious, gentle, forgiving, and longsuffering with our children as God is with us.

5. (3:22-4:1) *The new man's servant and master relationship.*

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

a. **Obey in all things your masters according to the flesh:** As Christians put on the new man, they will show a properly submissive attitude towards their **masters** - in a modern context, towards their employer or supervisor.

i. This is another sphere of God's order of authority. Employees have a God-ordained role of obedience and submission to their employers or supervisors.

ii. "It will be noted that this section is far longer than the other two; and its length may well be due to long talks which Paul had with the runaway slave,

Onesimus, whom later he was to send back to his master Philemon.” (Barclay)

iii. “More than half the people seen on the streets of the great cities of the Roman world were slaves. And this was the status of the majority of ‘professional’ people such as teachers and doctors as well as that of menials and craftsmen.” (Vaughan)

b. Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God: We are always tempted to work just as hard as we have to, thinking we only have to please man. But God wants every worker to see that ultimately, they work for *Him*. Therefore, they should **do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men**. God promises to **reward** those who work with that kind of heart.

i. The Christian who is a dishonest, lazy or unreliable worker has something far worse to deal with than a reprimand from his earthly supervisor. His heavenly supervisor may prepare a reprimand as well.

ii. “Far more culpable is the attitude of modern ‘clockwatchers,’ who have contracted to serve their employer and receive an agreed remuneration for their labor. But Christian slaves – or Christian employees today – have the highest of all motives for faithful and conscientious performance of duty; they are above all else servants of Christ, and will work first and foremost so as to please him.” (Bruce)

iii. **The reward of the inheritance:** “One should properly read ‘*the inheritance*’; the reference is clearly to the life of the age to come. This is ironic, since in earthly terms slaves could not inherit property.” (Wright)

iv. **For you serve the Lord Christ:** “The force of this unusual phrase (Paul nowhere else allows the titles ‘Lord’ and ‘Christ’ to stand together without the name ‘Jesus’ as well) could be brought out by a paraphrase: ‘so work for the true Master – Christ!’” (Wright)

c. **But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done:** When a Christian worker does poorly in his job, he should not expect special leniency from his boss, especially if his boss is a Christian. Being a Christian should make us *more* responsible, not *less* responsible.

i. “It is possible for an unfaithful servant to wrong and defraud his master in a great variety of ways without being detected; but let all such remember what is here said: he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he has done; God sees him, and will punish him for his breach of honesty and trust.” (Clarke)

ii. **Will be repaid... and there is no partiality:** For ancient Christian slaves and for modern Christian workers, there is no guarantee on earth of fairness of treatment from those whom they work for. Sometimes **partiality** means that bad workers are unfairly rewarded and good employees are penalized or left unrewarded. Paul assures both our ancient brethren and us that there is a final rewarding and punishment, and with this **there is no partiality**.

iii. In Eph 6:9 Paul addressed masters and warned *them* that there was *no partiality with* God. Here, he warned *servants* that there is **no partiality** with God. “In Ephesians masters are not to think that God is influenced by social position; in the present passage, slaves are not to act unscrupulously just because they

know men treat them as irresponsible chattel.”
(Vaughan)

d. **Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair:** As Christians put on the new man, they will be **just and fair** to those who work for them. It is a terrible thing for a boss to cheat or mistreat his workers, but far worse for a Christian to do it.

i. **Just and fair:** This is even more powerful than a command for masters to be *kind* or *pleasant* to slaves. One can be kind or pleasant to animals or pets; but we are only **just and fair** to fellow human beings. Paul asked masters to make a recognition that would undermine the very foundations of slavery.

ii. Through the history of Christianity, there have been some who used these passages where Paul speaks to slaves and their masters to *justify* or even *promote* the practice of slavery. Others have *blamed* these passages for the practice of slavery. Yet one can never blame Christianity for slavery; it was a universal practice that pre-dated both Christianity and the Jewish nation. Instead, one should see that the *abolition* of slavery came from Christian people and impulses, and not from any other major religion and certainly not from secularism.

iii. Without making an overt protest against slavery, Paul seemed to understand that if he could establish the point that slaves were equals in the body of Christ, full human beings with both responsibilities and rights (that they should be treated in a manner both **just and fair**), then in time the whole structure of slavery in the Roman Empire would crumble – and it did.

Col 4:1 Lords, give what is just and equal to the slaves, knowing that you have a Lord in Heaven also.

Further Instructions

Col 4:2 Steadfastly continue in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving,

Col 4:3 praying together about us also, that God may open to us a door of the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which I also have been bound,

Col 4:4 that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.

Col 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward the ones outside, redeeming the time.

Col 4:6 Let your word be always with grace, having been seasoned with salt, to know how you ought to answer each one.

Final Greetings

Col 4:7 All the things about me, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-slave in the Lord, will make known to you,

Col 4:8 whom I sent to you for this very thing, that he know the things about you, and that he might comfort your hearts,

Col 4:9 with Onesimus the faithful and beloved brother, who is of you. They will make known to you all the things here.

Col 4:10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, also Mark the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you received orders. If he comes to you, receive him.

Col 4:11 And Jesus, the one being called Justus, those being of the circumcision, greet you , these only fellow workers for the kingdom of God, who became a comfort to me.

Col 4:12 Epaphras greets you, he of you, a slave of Christ, always striving for you in prayers, that you may stand full-grown and being complete in every will of God.

Col 4:13 For I bear witness to him, that he has much zeal on your behalf, and those in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.

Col 4:14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, also Demas.

Col 4:15 Greet the brothers in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church in his house.

Col 4:16 And when this letter is read before you, cause that it be read also in the Laodicean church, and that you also read the one of Laodicea.

Col 4:17 And say to Archippus, Look to the ministry which you received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.

Col 4:18 The greeting by my hand, Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.

Colossians 4:1-18

Colossians 4 - Prayer Life, Personal Witness, and Final Greetings

A. The inner life of prayer and the outer life of witness.

1. (2-4) The inner life of prayer.

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

a. **Continue earnestly in prayer:** Paul supported the Colossian church through His prayers for them (Col 1:3-8). Their life and ministry would continue to prosper through continued vigilance in prayer, including prayer on their part.

i. The ancient Greek word translated **continue** is "Built on a root meaning 'to be strong,' it always connotes earnest adherence to a person or thing. In this passage it implies persistence and fervor." (Vaughan)

ii. This sort of *earnest* prayer is important, but does not come easy. **Earnestly in prayer** speaks of great effort steadily applied. "Heaven's gate is not to be stormed by one weapon but by many. Spare no arrows, Christian. Watch and see that none of the arms in thy armoury are rusty. Besiege the throne of God with a hundred hands, and look at the promise with a hundred eyes. You have a great work on hand for you have to move the arm that moves the world; watch, then, for every means of moving that arm. See to it that you ply every promise; that you use every argument; that you wrestle with all might." (Spurgeon)

b. **Being vigilant in it with thanksgiving**: We are to be **vigilant** in prayer, but always praying **with thanksgiving** for the great things God has done.

i. Barclay on **vigilant**: "Literally the Greek means to be *wakeful*. The phrase could well mean that Paul is telling them not to go to sleep when they pray." Sometimes, because of the tiredness of our body or mind, we struggle against sleep when we pray. Other times we pray *as if* we were asleep, and our prayers simply sound and feel tired and sleepy.

ii. "Prayer should be mingled with praise. I have heard that in New England after the Puritans had settled there a long while, they used to have very often a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, till they had so many days of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, that at last a good senator proposed that they should change

it for once, and have a day of thanksgiving.” (Spurgeon)

iii. “The connection here with thanksgiving may suggest the threefold rhythm: intercession, ‘watching’ for answers to prayer, and thanksgiving when answers appear.” (Wright)

c. **Meanwhile praying also for us:** Paul seemed to say, “As long as we are on the subject of prayer, please pray **for us!**” But Paul didn’t ask for prayer for his personal needs (which were many), but **that God would open to us a door for the word.**

i. The same word picture of an open door as an open opportunity for the gospel is seen in passages such as Act 14:27, 1Co 16:9, and 2Co 2:12.

d. **As I ought to speak:** Even though Paul was **in chains** for his faithfulness to the gospel, he knew that he **ought to speak** it in a way that would **make it manifest** (clearly evident). Paul wanted prayer that he would continue to make the gospel clear and evident, even if it meant more **chains**.

i. Robertson comments on Paul’s words, **as I ought to speak:** “Wonderful as Paul’s preaching was to his hearers and seems to us, he was never satisfied with it. What preacher can be?”

2. (5-6) The outer life of witness.

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

a. **Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside:** The Christian life isn’t only lived in the prayer closet. There also must be practical, lived-out Christianity, which lives wisely **toward those who are outside**. How we

speaking has a lot to do with this, so we must let our **speech always be with grace.**

i. "Distorted accounts of Christian conduct and belief were in circulation; it was important that Christians should give no color to these calumnies, but should rather give the lie to them by their regular manner of life." (Bruce)

ii. **Let your speech always be with grace:** "The word 'grace' has, in Greek as in English, the possible double meaning of God's grace and human graciousness." (Wright)

iii. "In classical writers 'salt' expressed the wit with which conversation was flavoured." (Peake) "Grace and salt (wit, sense) make an ideal combination." (Robertson)

b. **That you may know how you ought to answer each one:** Paul believed that Christians would **answer** others from Biblical truth, and that they would work at knowing how to communicate those answers to **those who are outside.**

i. Barclay translates Col 4:6 this way: *Let your speech always be with gracious charm, seasoned with the salt of wit, so that you will know the right answer to give in every case.* He explains: "Here is an interesting injunction. It is all too true that Christianity in the minds of many is connected with a kind of sanctimonious dullness and an outlook in which laughter is almost a heresy... The Christian must commend his message with the charm and the wit which were in Jesus himself."

ii. "They must strive to cultivate the gift of pleasant and wise conversation, so that they may be able to speak appropriately to each individual (with his

peculiar needs) with whom they come in contact.” (Peake)

iii. Col 4:2-6 shows that God is concerned *both* about our personal prayer life *and* our interaction with the world. He cares both about the prayer closet and the public street, and He wants us to care about both also.

iv. This is also an important idea to connect with the earlier passages of Colossians. Paul spent considerable time in this letter explaining the truth and refuting bad doctrine. Yet all the correct knowledge was of little good until it was applied in *both* the prayer closet and the public street of daily life. We could say that here, Paul genuinely completes his letter.

B. Personal notes concluding the letter.

1. (7-9) Regarding Tychicus and Onesimus, messengers of the letter.

Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one of you*. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here.

a. **Tychicus, a beloved brother:** Apparently, the Colossian Christians didn't know who Tychicus was. He would carry this letter to them (**will tell you all the news about me**).

i. Apparently Epaphras, who brought the news from Colosse to Paul in Rome (Col 1:7), would not return to Colosse soon; so Paul sent **Tychicus** instead.

ii. **Tychicus** is mentioned in Act 20:4 as one of the men who came with Paul from the Roman province of

Asia to Jerusalem, to carry the offering of those believers to the needy Christians of Jerusalem and Judea.

iii. "The reference to Tychicus is almost word for word identical with Eph 6:21-22. He was evidently the bearer of the letter to the Ephesians as well as this one." (Bruce)

b. With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother:

Onesimus was a slave owned by a believer in Colosse, but he ran away and came into contact with Paul in Rome. There, Onesimus became a Christian and a dedicated helper to Paul. His story is continued in Paul's letter to Philemon.

i. Paul *could have* wrote about Onesimus, "the escaped slave who I am sending back to his master." Instead, he called him **a faithful and beloved brother**, and let the Colossian Christians know that Onesimus was now **one of you**.

2. (10-11) Greetings from three of Paul's faithful Jewish friends.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

a. **Aristarchus**: He was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Act 20:4). He was Paul's travel companion, and with the apostle when the Ephesian mob seized Paul (Act 19:29). He was also with Paul when he set sail for Rome under his Roman imprisonment (Act 27:2). Here Paul calls him **my fellow prisoner**. It seems that **Aristarchus** had an interesting habit of being *with* Paul

in hard times. Some (such as William Ramsay) suggest that he actually made himself Paul's slave so that he could travel with him on this journey to Rome.

b. Mark the cousin of Barnabas... if he comes to you, welcome him: Though Paul had much earlier a falling out with both Barnabas and Mark (Act 13:5; Act 13:13; Act 15:36-40), clearly by the time he wrote this all was in the past. The grace of God working in Paul meant that time changed him and softened him towards others who had previously offended him.

i. "It is from this reference alone that we learn that Mark was Barnabas' cousin – a piece of information which throws light on the special consideration which Barnabas gives to Mark in the narrative of Acts." (Bruce)

ii. Because Paul identified Mark in terms of his relationships with Barnabas, it seems that the Colossian Christians knew who Barnabas was. Either this was through his reputation or through further missionary journeys that were not recorded in the Book of Acts. It reminds us that the Book of Acts is an *incomplete* record of the history of the early church.

c. Jesus who is called Justus: Of this man, we know nothing except his name. He is numbered among these previous four men, all of them *comforters* to Paul in his Roman custody preceding his trial before Caesar (**they have proved to be a comfort to me**).

d. My only fellow workers... who are of the circumcision: At that time, Paul had only three **fellow workers** with a Jewish heritage. Yet these three did a great work, they **proved to be a comfort to** Paul.

i. Paul was in Roman custody because of a Jewish riot on the temple mount over the mere mention of God's

offer of grace to the Gentiles (
Act 22:21-22).

ii. Adam Clarke drew out a logical conclusion from the words, **These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision**: "It is evident, therefore, that Peter was not now at Rome, else he certainly would have been mentioned in this list; for we cannot suppose that he was in the list of those who preached Christ in an exceptionable way, and from impure and unholy motives: indeed, there is no evidence that Peter ever saw Rome."

3. (12-13) Greetings from Epaphras.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.

a. **Always laboring fervently for you in prayers**: Prayer is hard work, and Epaphras worked diligently at it, especially knowing the danger of the false teaching in Colosse. So, Epaphras prayed that the Colossian Christians would **stand perfect and complete in all the will of God**. This is a wonderful prayer to pray for anyone.

i. Paul called Epaphras a **bondservant of Christ**, using a phrase that he often applied to himself, but never to anyone else, except here and in Php 1:1 where he speaks of himself and Timothy together as *bondservants* of Jesus.

ii. Epaphras was a **bondservant**, and *prayer* was an important area where he worked hard. **Laboring fervently** "is a free translation of *echei polyn ponon*,

a phrase the key word of which (*ponom*) suggest heavy toil to the extent of pain.” (Vaughan)

b. **He has a great zeal for you:** Epaphras prayed well because he *cared* well. If he lagged in **zeal**, he certainly would have lagged in prayer.

4. (14) *Greetings from Luke and Demas.*

Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

a. **Luke the beloved physician:** This is the one passage that informs us that Luke, the human author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, was a physician. We also see that his works are written with a more scientific, analytical mindset (Luk 1:1-4) and have much detail that a physician would be interested in (Luk 4:38; Luk 5:12-15; Luk 8:43).

i. Perhaps Luke was in Rome to deliver a document he recently finished - the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Book of Acts*, which probably were together a “friend of the court” report, explaining to the Romans why Paul stood before Caesar’s court.

b. **Demas:** Here, nothing positive is said about **Demas**, only that he greets the Colossian Christians and therefore must have been known to them. In Phm 1:24 he is grouped among Paul’s *fellow laborers*. Yet in the last mention of him (2Ti 4:10), Paul said that Demas had forsaken him, *having loved this present world*, and that he had gone on to Thessalonica.

i. “Surely here we have the faint outlines of a study in degeneration, loss of enthusiasm and failure in the faith.” (Barclay)

ii. The six people who greeted the Colossians were connected with Paul in Rome, during the time of his house arrest and custody before appearing on trial before Caesar. This shows that during this

imprisonment – unlike the later one described in 2 Timothy – Paul, though chained, enjoyed at least the occasional company of many friends and associates.

5. (15) *Greeting to Nymphas and the Laodiceans.*

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his house.

a. **Laodicea:** This was the same city later mentioned in the scathing rebuke of Rev 3:14-22, and it was a neighboring city of Colosse, along with Hierapolis (Col 4:13).

b. **Nymphas:** There has been some considerable debate as to if Paul referred to a *man* or a *woman* with this name. Some manuscripts have the masculine form and some have the feminine.

i. "Much ink has been spilt over the question whether the individual here mentioned is a woman (Nympha) or a man (Nymphas). Both forms are found in the manuscript tradition, and certainty seems impossible on this (fortunately not very significant) point." (Wright)

c. **The church that is in his house:** Having no buildings of their own, the early church met as "house churches." Because few houses were large, there were usually several "house churches" in a city, with a pastor or elder over each one.

i. "Such house-churches were apparently smaller circles of fellowship within the larger fellowship of the city *ekklesia*." (Bruce)

ii. "We must remember that there was no such thing as a special Church building until the third century. Up to that time the Christian congregations met in the houses of those who were the leaders of the Church." (Barclay)

6. (16) *Instructions for spreading the message in this letter.*

Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

a. **Now when this epistle is read among you:** When Paul and other apostles wrote letters to churches, the letters were simply publicly read in the congregations. It was a way for the apostle to teach that church even when he could not personally be there.

b. **See that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans:** It was the general practice to distribute all apostolic letters among the churches, especially those close to each other.

i. "Here we undoubtedly have the principle reason for the preservation of Paul's letters in the sub-apostolic period, and their eventual adoption as part of the canonical 'new covenant' books: their author intended them to carry, in writing, the authority which had been invested in him as an apostle." (Wright)

ii. This helps us to understand how and why the letters would have been copied almost immediately, and how slight mistakes in copying the manuscripts could come in at an early date.

c. **And that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea:** Apparently, Paul wrote a letter to the Laodiceans that we do not have. We should not assume from this that our treasure of inspiration is incomplete. The Holy Spirit has chosen to preserve those letters that are inspired for the church in a universal sense. Paul was not inspired in this way every time he set pen to paper.

i. It may be that this "missing" Laodicean letter was actually the letter to the Ephesians. "It is well-nigh certain that *Ephesians* was not written to the Church

at Ephesus but was an encyclical letter meant to circulate among the Churches of Asia. It may be that this encyclical had reached Laodicea and was now on the way to Colosse." (Barclay)

ii. There is a Latin letter of Paul to the Laodiceans and it was mentioned as early as the fifth century by Jerome. But Jerome himself called it a forgery and that most people in his day agreed that it was not authentic. It is mainly made up of phrases from Philippians and Galatians. Adam Clarke had a low opinion of this letter: "As to its being the work of St. Paul, little or nothing need be said; its barrenness of meaning, poverty of style, incoherency of manner, and total want of design and object, are a sufficient refutation of its pretensions."

7. (17) *A special word to Archippus.*

And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

a. **And say to Archippus:** This special word to **Archippus** is of special interest. Paul wrote another short word regarding **Archippus** in another letter, mentioning *Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house* (Phm 1:2).

i. This mention in Phm 1:2 makes some people believe that he was the son of Philemon, since he is mentioned in the context of the wife of Philemon (*Apphia*) and his household (*the church in your house*). It also shows that Paul thought highly of Archippus and valued him as an associate in God's work (*our fellow soldier*).

ii. The context of Col 4:17 leads some to think that though Archippus was part of the family of Philemon,

he was connected with the church at Laodicea. Perhaps Archippus was the pastor of the church at Laodicea. Of course, there is no way to know this for certain.

b. Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry":

Paul wanted Archippus to be encouraged and strengthened, but he did not make this appeal to Archippus directly. He asked that it come to Archippus *through* the Colossians (or the Laodiceans).

i. "Presumably he would be present when the letter was read, either in the Colossian church or, later, when it had been sent to Laodicea. This was perhaps calculated to impress him the more with the solemnity of his responsibility to carry out his service." (Bruce)

ii. Therefore, it was *more fitting* for the Colossians (or Laodiceans) to say this to Archippus than for Paul himself to say it to him. He needed to hear this from the people around him: "Fulfill your ministry." When the Colossians spoke up, then Archippus knew his ministry was *wanted*. "Many an *Archippus* is sluggish, because the *Colossians* are silent." (Dyke)

iii. They need to say "*fulfill your ministry*" directly *to* Archippus, not *behind* him. Whispering it behind his back would do no good. They had to say it *to* him.

c. Take heed to the ministry: This encouragement to **Archippus** spoke both to him and to us regarding some enduring principles of ministry.

- God gives **ministry** to His people.
- True **ministry** is **received in the Lord**.
- **Ministry** *may* be left *unfulfilled*.
- One must **take heed** to their ministry in order for it to be **fulfilled**.

- We should encourage *others* to **fulfill** their **ministry**.
 - i. "It is more likely, therefore, that the words of the apostle convey no censure, but are rather intended to stir him up to further diligence, and to encourage him in the work, seeing he had so much false doctrine and so many false teachers to contend with." (Clarke)
 - ii. Thinking Archippus to be a pastor, Trapp applied the principle of **take heed to the ministry** to him: "The Church is thy proper element, the pulpit thy right *ubi* [place]; the sanctuary should be the centre of all thy circumference."

8. (18) Conclusion.

This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

- a. **This salutation by my own hand:** As was the custom in that day, Paul generally dictated his letters and personally signed a postscript with his **own hand**.
- b. **Remember my chains:** There is much emotion, sorrow, and strength in this simple phrase. Paul not only knew the confinement and loneliness of the prisoner; he also had the uncertainty of not knowing if his case before Caesar's court would end with his execution.
 - i. "The chain clanked afresh as Paul took the pen to sign the salutation. He was not likely to forget it himself." (Robertson)
 - ii. "Paul's references to his sufferings are not pleas for sympathy; they are his claims to authority, the guarantees of his right to speak." (Barclay)
- c. **Grace be with you:** Paul's conclusion is the only one possible for the apostle of grace, confronting a heresy emphasizing elaborate hidden mysteries and

righteousness through works. We can only go forward safely in the Christian life if grace is with us.